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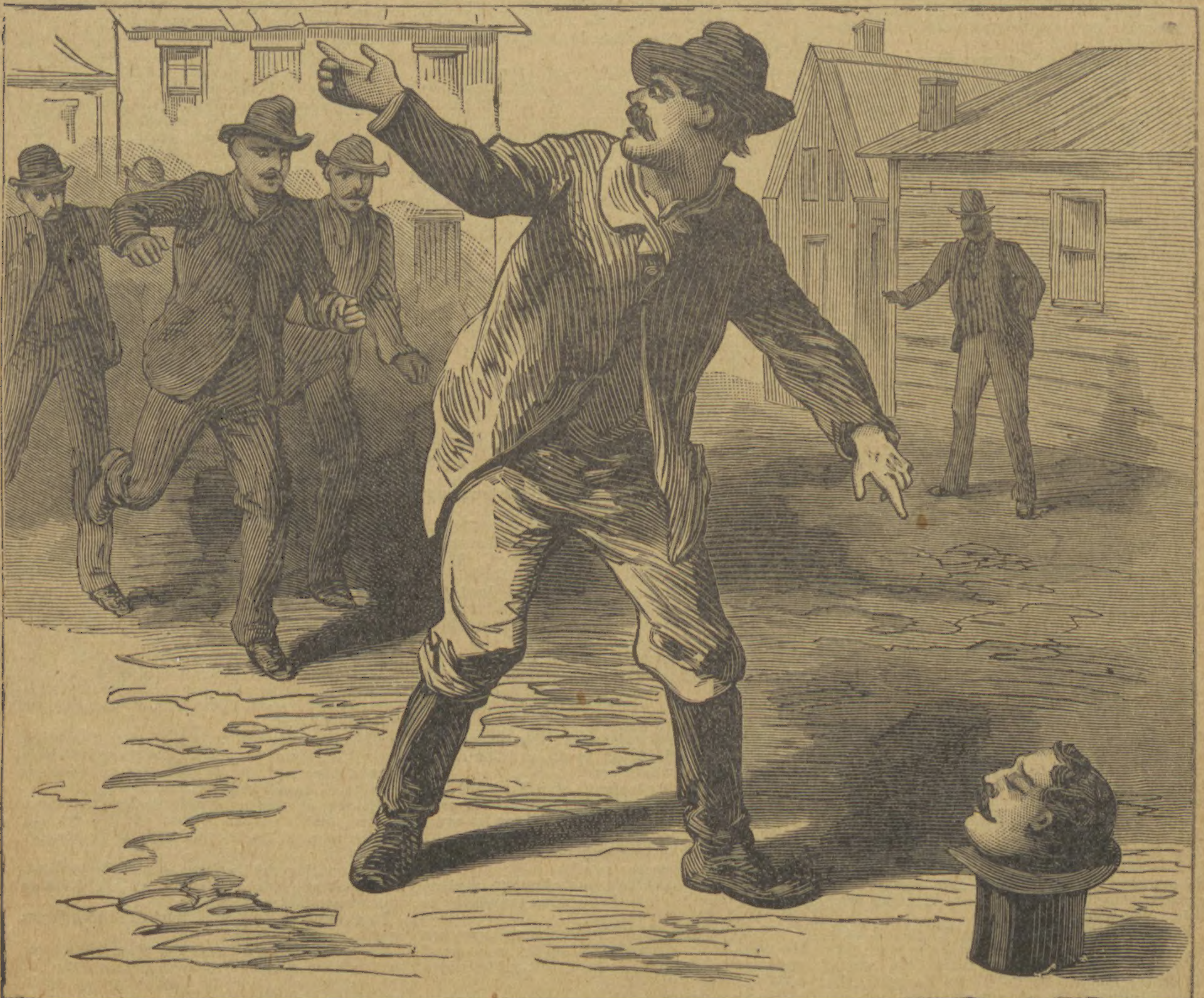
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Vol. XL.

DANDY DICK'S DOUBLES;

Or, The Severed Head
of Paradise Pocket.

BY ROBERT R. INMAN.



HIS SHOUTS SOON BROUGHT MEN INTO THE STREET FROM EVERY DIRECTION.

Dandy Dick's Double;

OR,

The Severed Head of Paradise Pocket.

BY ROBERT RANDOLPH INMAN,
AUTHOR OF "DANDY DICK, DETECTIVE; OR, THE
STILL HUNT AT BURNT MATCH."

OPENING SCENE.

"DICK DARREL, we'll settle that score now!"
The hour is dusk—the scene a wild, mountain
canyon; three men the actors.

One of the three is mounted on a spirited
horse, while the other two are on foot. The one
mounted holds the others under the cover of a
pair of grim revolvers.

Of the two on foot, one is a rough-looking
character of the usual Western type; the other,
in a high silk hat and patent-leather boots, and
clad in a suit of finest broadcloth, may be effec-
tively described by the one word "dandy."

It has been an unexpected meeting. These
two and the horseman have come suddenly
face to face at an abrupt bend in the canyon,
and in an instant the horseman has flashed forth
his revolvers, at the same time giving voice to
the exclamation we have quoted. He holds the
vantage hand.

Hot words immediately follow; the "dandy"
accepts the challenge—since he must either fight
or be shot down like a dog, and casting aside his
revolvers he grasps a knife and steps boldly for-
ward. At this moment his rough-looking com-
panion, seeing, as he believes, a possible chance,
attempts to draw a weapon to fire a shot at their
common enemy; but, quick as the lightning the
horseman's revolvers speak, and the man drops
in his tracks.

At once, then, the horseman dismounts, puts
away his revolvers and draws a knife, and at
each other the two rush, like tigers. It is a
short, sharp fight, and it ends as suddenly as
begun. The "dandy" falls, the knife of his foe
having pierced his heart, and a satanic smile
lights the face of the victor. For a moment he
stands above the body, gloating with malignant
exultation over his fallen foe, and then, as
though actuated by a sudden thought and fierce
desire, falls again upon the body and—severs the
head from the trunk!

That done, he grasps the head by the hair,
holds it up in the fast fading light, a bellish smile
upon his face, as he exclaims:

"Dick Darrel, this settles your case! It was
of no use your kicking against Devil Duval. I'll
take your head to the nearest camp, and there
set it up as an example, a warning to others who
may hanker after my scalp. It will show them
a splendid specimen of my handiwork! Ha!
ha! ha!"

Putting down the head, he lifts the body and
hurls it behind some bowlders lying near, and
after dragging the other body to one side, takes
up the head, mounts his horse and rides away,
the hideous object hanging by its hair in his left
hand.

CHAPTER I.

A STARTLING DISCLOSURE.

PARADISE POCKET was horrified.

A wild camp though it was, and full of roughs
and toughs, this was a little too much for its
nerve.

The man who had made the discovery, one
"Half-head Hugh," had been just about knock-
ed out by it, as the "boys" expressed it; and
Hard-head Hugh was one of the toughest men
the camp could show.

He made it his boast that he was always the
first man up, of a morning, at Paradise Pocket;
and as nobody disputed his claim to that honor,
much less trying to vie with him for the
laurels, what he claimed was about the fact of
the case.

But if Hard-head was the first man up, Tony
Gallagher, proprietor of the Round-up Saloon,
was always second; for Hugh was no sooner out
than he struck a bee-line for Tony's place to get
his morning nip, and Tony had to respond with
greatest alacrity in order to save the door from
being kicked down.

On this particular morning Hugh had over-
slept himself a little, and the chances were that
somebody would be ahead of him on the street if
he didn't hustle. So he hustled accordingly,
bounding out of his cabin in a half-dressed con-
dition, and starting across the Plaza toward the
Round-up Saloon, finishing as he ran. It was

broad daylight, but he was the first man on the
street and his honors were safe.

He had proceeded nearly half-way across the
Plaza, and was adjusting the last sixpenny nail
in his raiment, when he came to a sudden stop,
and stared at something just ahead of him in the
middle of the Square.

For the first second Hard-head Hugh, hard of
head as he was reputed, was almost chilled to
the marrow, and was entirely unable to speak
or move. His eyes bulged, he craned his neck
like a flamingo, and he could not believe that
he saw aright. He even questioned in mind
whether it could be possible that he had "got
'em."

But this state lasted only a few moments, for
as soon as he had satisfied himself that there was
no mistake about what he saw, then he began to
bellow aloud like a maniac, calling upon the peo-
ple of the camp to turn out in all haste to share
with him the horror of his frightful find.

"Hullo!" he howled, "hullo, citzens! Hustle
out hyar, ye lazy lunks, an' see ther gol-darned-
est find of ther season! Use me fer a bootjack
if I ain't erbout ready ter go inter a fit over it!
Waugh! it's ther horriblest tbing I ever did see!
Comel ye lazy galoots! git a move on yer, fer
this hyar beats ther general from ther warm
clime—it does, by tarnation! Hullo! bullo! hullo!"

The horrified Hard-head's shouts soon brought
men into the street from every direction, and as
they appeared upon the scene the discoverer stood
pointing at the hideous find.

There in the center of the Square as near as
may be, was a human head, resting upon—or
better, in—a high silk hat that stood crown
downward on the ground.

It was a discovery well calculated to horrify
even a worse place than this wild camp of Para-
dise Pocket.

As the citizens came running to the spot they
formed a circle around the dread object, and
there they stood, speechless at first, gazing at it
in silent awe.

The head was that of a young man, and one
who, in life, had been good-looking. The fea-
tures were clear-cut, the hair dark, and a black
moustache graced—had graced in life—the face.

The hat was one that apparently had been re-
cently new and elegant, though it was now some-
what soiled and battered, and there was a bullet-
hole through the crown of it, front and back.
But there was no evidence that the bullet had
struck the man's head.

And this was the discovery that had taken the
nerve out of Hard-head Hugh when he came up-
on it so unexpectedly.

"What does yer think of it?" that early riser
demanded, turning to the crowd he had been
successful in bringing to the spot. "Don't it
make yer blood feel like milk in yer veins? It
did in mine, at first blush, an' sour milk at that,
by tarnation!"

"It are enough ter give a feller ther creeps,
an' that I'm sayin' myself," declared one of
those who had been among the first upon the
scene.

"Does anybody know the face?" asked an-
other. "Seems to me he's a stranger about
hyar."

"Poor cuss! he have lost his think-box, any-
how," another sympathetically put in.

"But who hev done ther nasty work?" cried
Hard-head. "That's ther question what have
got ther court by ther years jest now. What
pizen galoot hev killed the lad, cut off his head,
an' then put ther town of Paradise Pocket to
the shame by bringin' it hyar an' settin' it right
down hyar under our noses? That's what we
wants ter find out, pards; by tarnation!"

"Take it up, somebody, an' let's look at it,"
suggested Tony Gallagher, who had been the
very first to respond to Hard-head's call.
"Mebbe somebody will reckernize it if it's held
up ter sight."

This was something, however, that no one con-
sidered a desirable thing to do, and for a few
moments no one volunteered.

"Wal, if ye are all afraid of it," cried Hard-
head Hugh, who had now regained his nerve to
a degree, "I'll do it meself. Hyar it are,"
stooping and lifting the awful object by the hair,
like a headman of bygone times.

"Anybody know ther gent?"

Nobody did, and Hugh was about to replace
the head upon the hat again, when something in
the hat caught his eye.

"Hyar is somethin'," he announced, putting
the head on the ground and taking a piece of
paper out of the hat. "Hyar is what tells ther
tale." And he read aloud:

"TO THE CITIZENS OF PARADISE POCKET:—

GREETING:—

"Here is the head of one who pitted himself

against Devil Duval. His body has filled the maws
of coyotes. Let this be a warning to aspiring
avengers. Plant the thing if you want to, and if you
honor the spot with stick or stone mark on it—
"DICK DARREL."

CHAPTER II.

DEVIL'S PICKED DOZEN.

If the citizens of Paradise Pocket were thrill-
ed with horror at the finding of a severed head
on the public Square of their lively camp, the
mention of that dreaded name, "Devil Duval,"
gave them another shock that proved almost as
bad as the first had been.

Only a few days previous to the time of which
the opening of our story treats, a band of a
dozen horsemen, all armed to the teeth and com-
pletely masked, had dashed into the camp one
evening, just when dusk was giving place to
darkness, and had literally taken the town by
force of arms. For an hour or more they held
high revel in the Round-up Saloon, having
everything their own way.

On the wall of the saloon was a posted placard,
offering a thousand dollars reward for the
capture of the outlaw, "Devil Duval," as he
was called; with an additional sum of five
hundred for his "lieutenant," who was known
as the "Devil's Right Bower." And at that
placard, after the twelve had helped themselves
to a liberal supply of Tony's liquid lightning,
the dozen fired several shots from their re-
volvers, filling it full of holes.

They had come into the saloon mounted, all of
them, to the danger of sinking the floor, and as
their animals stamped and plunged about it
seemed as though the whole building must come
down. But the beams under the floor rested
upon the ground, so it was safe, though the
strain was something it could not otherwise have
resisted. And when these shots had been fired
and the placard pretty thoroughly perforated,
the leader of the band, under the protection
of the weapons of his followers, made the an-
nouncement that he was the outlaw.

"Citizens of Paradise Pocket," had been his
words, "I am that Devil Duval, and these are
my men. We have styled ourselves the Devil's
Picked Dozen, and we are going to make our-
selves worthy the name. My first band of six,
called the Devil's Half-Dozen, got wiped out, all
save me and my Right Bower. They were
hanged at Burnt Match, as you must have heard.
Now we are going to avenge the death of those
poor fellows, and we mean to begin right here.
Devil Duval is going to be worthy the name that
has been given him, and the man who tries to
earn that reward, dies! Be warned of that;
and beware of the Devil's Picked Dozen."

With that, then, several more shots were fired
into the placard, and the band made a dash for
the open door, shooting as they went, right into
the crowd, while with yells and screams worthy
of demons from below, the outlaws dashed away
up the street.

Two men had been killed by their brutal fusil-
ade, while half a dozen others were more or less
hurt; and the evil having been done and the
outlaws gone, the camp rose in arms and bowled
its impotent bowl of rage, vowing vengeance
undying against Devil Duval and his Dozen,
swearing they would bring their career to a
speedy termination.

It was the unanimous verdict that Devil Duval
and his band must be wiped out. The outlaw
had been heard of there before, of course, for his
name had become the terror of all that section
of country; but the citizens of Paradise Pocket
had little dreamed what a devil he really was.

The news from Burnt Match, that the band
had been broken up, and three or four of the
rascals hanged, had given a feeling of security
to all the towns and camps for many miles
around, and especially to this distant camp of
Paradise Pocket.

But now from that feeling of security against
the visitations of the outlaws had come this rude
awakening, and the Pocket was wild—more
than wild, as can be imagined.

The rest of that night was one long-continued
uproar, and the citizens went around carrying
all the weapons they could individually find and
tackle on.

But nothing further was seen of the outlaws,
and gradually the excitement cooled down as
much as could be expected.

Next day the dead were buried, but vigilance
was in no wise relaxed.

By the time several days had passed, however,
and nothing further had been seen or heard of
the cut-throats, the camp was relapsing again
into its state of fancied safety.

Now had come the second rude reminder that
Devil Duval, the hunted and proscribed outlaw,

was not asleep. The finding of this severed head alone ought to have told them this, without the additional proof of the note in the hat.

After the reading of that note, to turn again to our point of starting, the crowd stood for some seconds in speechless awe, each man looking at his elbow neighbor as if mutely asking the question—What is coming next? And for as many seconds no one offering to answer it.

Har.-head Hugh was the first to speak.

"Feller pards," he said, "this hyar are just a leetle wuss than awful, it are, by tarnation! What is goin' ter be done about it? Is there any crime on ther calendar that he wouldn't do? I think not, by tarnation! Look at this hyar pore cuss what he have deprived of his head; don't it make yer want ter weep fer him—fer this feller whose head this is, I mean? Wonder who he has been when ther rest of him was attached? But, by tarnation! 'Dick Darrel' are ther name what's on this hyar paper what was in ther hat, an' ain't that ther name of ther feller what had ther tussle with the outlaw over at Burnt Match? It be, sure's yer' born; it are ther same, by tarnation!"

CHAPTER III.

ARRIVAL OF A STRANGER.

PARADISE POCKET was many miles from the camp of Burnt Match, and, if possible, its surroundings were even more wild and rugged.

It was certainly a good deal further away from any town of considerable size, and in most affairs was a law unto itself.

But, distant as it was, the exciting events at Burnt Match had speedily been rumored there, soon to be confirmed by the arrival of a man who had been a witness of it all.

That man was one Henry Hoyke, better known as "Hikey Hen," a citizen of Paradise Pocket, who had happened to be at Burnt Match at the time. He was in the habit of taking "periodicals," as he called them; that is, periodically he would go upon a "tear," filling himself with "lightning influence" and figuratively "painting the town red" for several days. Then, to sober up, he would wander away, sometimes a full hundred miles, returning in the course of two weeks or a month.

He was at home now, and no sooner had Hard-head Hugh finished speaking than there was a general cry for "Hikey Hen," and the citizens looked around to see if he was anywhere in the crowd.

"He's ther galoot we wants," assumed Hard-head. "He was thar at ther time of ther difficulty, an' seen ther feller himself. He'll know whether this is ther same Dick Darrel."

"But yer will have ter go an' kick ther door off ther hinges ter git him out at this early hour," was declared.

"I reckon that's about so," coincided Tony Gallagher. "He's never up as 'arly as this, unless he's on a periodical, an' then he don't go ter roost er tall."

This being the case, several men set off in all haste to roust Mr. Hoyke out and bring him to the scene.

It took considerable pounding to awaken him, but finally he responded with a growl, and presently opened the door of his shanty and came forth.

He was a rough-looking customer, clad in "stogy" boots and slouchy hat, between which was a lengthy stretch of dirty red shirt and greasy-looking trowsers, divided at the middle by a belt in which was a monster revolver and a knife to match.

Bushy red hair and beard were his most striking adornments of head and face. His complexion was rusty, what little was to be seen, except his nose, which had a tendency toward redness; and his eyes had that watery, pale look about them that is characteristic of alcohol in the system.

"Hullo!" he exclaimed, at sight of the men assembled around his door. "What is ther trouble, feller-citizens?"

His hand fell upon his revolver, and he glared around in something of a half-frightened manner, as though he imagined there might be trouble ahead.

"You is wanted out hyar," was the response. "We hev diskivered ther head of a mau, an' we wants ter see if you knows ther lad by ther looks of his physiog."

"Ther head of a mau?" echoed Mr. Hoyke. "Git out; you're jokin'. This hyar are some sell ye are tryin' ter git enter me. I won't go. Yer don't git Hikey Hen enter no sech fool business as this hyar, you bet!"

"But it ain't no ketch er tall," he was earnestly assured. "See ther crowd out thar, will yer. Hard-head Hugh diskivered ther find

when he got out o' roost, an' now ther hull blame camp are out thar gazin' at it. It's a mau's head, shaved right off clean from his shoulders. Come on!"

Thus reassured and urged, the fellow saw that something unusual was in the wind, and went with the others back to the scene of the excitement.

When they came up, Hard-head Hugh addressed Hikey, saying:

"Hikey Hen, we has found jest ther goldarneddest find of ther season, an' we wants ter know if you ever see'd ther feller in life. Now we won't mention no name, but hyar's ther head, an' now you name it if yer kin."

With that he stepped back from in front of the dread object, and pointed at it with a finger.

At sight of the dead features the rough-looking Hoyke gave a start.

"Great gophers!" he exclaimed, if it ain't—ain't—ain't—"

"If it ain't *who*?" demanded Hard-head.

"Spit it out, man," urged Tony Gallagher.

"Durn it! what wur his handle?" Hikey Hen cried. "I means ther feller over ter Burnt Match—ther same one as I told yer had ther book-to with Devil Duval—"

"Does yer mean Dick Darrel, him as yer said was called Dandy Dick?"

"That's it! That's ther name! Yes; this hyar are his cabeza, or I'm blind in one optick an' cross-eyed in t'other. It's him, feller pards, fer rocks. But, how did it come hyar? Ten ter a dime it hev been ther work of ther Devil Dozen!"

Mr. Hoyke's evidence was conclusive in the matter, and the great volley of remarks and so forth that immediately followed would defy all attempts at quoting, even were it essential.

While the crowd was still there, and while the excitement was yet high, and the flow of talk unending, a horseman was seen approaching from up the valley.

"Hullo!" exclaimed Hard-head Hugh, "what hev we hyar?"

With the words he pointed in the direction of the coming horseman, and every eye was turned that way.

The traveler was yet a little distance away, but near enough for careful inspection. He was clad in black, with coat buttoned to the chin, and had the appearance of a preacher.

He wore a low, black hat with broad, stiff brim, his face was clean shaved, and he had on a "choker" collar of spotless white. Gloves were on his hands, and a pair of spectacles partly concealed his eyes.

Mounted upon a very small mustang, his legs were not far from the ground, and he did not appear to be riding with either ease or comfort. As he drew nearer, it was seen that his age must be something in the thirties, and he appeared to be tired and worn with his journey.

"A gospel sharp, by tarnation!" Hard-head quickly added to his first exclamation, answering his inquiry himself.

"That's what he are, fer a ten ter a dime!" agreed Hikey Hen. "If he have taken a contract ter convart this hyar camp, he hev got a lifetime job."

"An' if he sets his mill a-runnin' too close ter my place," finished Tony Gallagher, "he'll go meanderin' up ther golden stairs afore he is aware of it, and his career of usefulness will be cut short."

By this time the stranger was at hand, and drawing his little mustang to a stop, he said:

"Sinners, now is the accepted time! How many of you can read your titles clear to mansions in the skies?"

"Beg yer parding, parson," spoke up Hard-head, "but we have got something else ter think about jest now. Jest look hyar, an' tell us what yer thinks o' this."

As he spoke the words he reached to the ground, lifted the severed head by its hair, and held it aloft for the good man's inspection, while every eye was upon the stranger to see how he would stand the shock.

The man stared at it with eyes at their widest and mouth agape. His whole appearance was indicative of the greatest horror. And indeed it was enough to horrify anybody, as had been well proven in the case of Hard-head Hugh. The dread object was more hideous in the reality than the imagination can conceive.

CHAPTER IV.

A SUGGESTION FROM THE STRANGER.

ALL remained silent.

It was some seconds before the stranger spoke. "Hardened sinners," he presently demanded, "what is the meaning of this?"

"It means that this hyar are ther calabash of

some pore cuss what fell inter ther hands of Devil Duval," explained Hard-head.

"Devil Duval?" the stranger repeated. "Who is he?"

"Never heerd o' him?" in great surprise.

"I believe I never have."

"Then whar d'ye hail from? He's known ter every man for five hundred miles around, by repertation anyhow. Ever hear of ther Devil's Picked Dozen?"

"No, no. The only devil I know anything about is the Evl One himself. Him I am waging a warfare against, continually. But is it possible that there lives a man so vile as to do a deed like this?"

"Bet yer life it are!" exclaimed Hikey Hen. "An' say, parson, if yer wants ter win a leetle glory as yer goes along, an' at ther same time add a clean thousand to your pile, jest let up a bit on ther Old Gent an' chip in with us against this hyar cuss."

This caused a titter to run through the crowd, and the stranger held up his hands with a show of horror.

"Tempt me not!" he cried. "I am not seeking worldly distinction. I have a higher mission to perform. But it seems to me that face has been familiar to me at some time or other in the past. Will you oblige me, sir, by holding it a little nearer?"

"Yer is welcome ter squint at it at as close range as yer wants ter," answered Hard-head, and he stepped nearer. "Think yer ever knowed ther gentleman?"

The stranger took a critical look at the dead features, and there came upon his own face an expression difficult to define. It would be hard to say whether it was one of recognition or of uncertainty.

"No, I don't think I ever did," he finally responded, slowly. "Poor fellow! And what a text for a sermon! Alas! how short the brittle thread of life is at best, and how easily broken! Sinners, now is the accepted time! How many of you can read your titles clear to—"

"Beg yer parding, parson, as I said afore," interrupted Hard-head Hugh, "but we has got other things ter think about. This hyar Devil Duval, as we speaks of, an' his Devil's Picked Dozen, is ther curse of ther country hyarabouts, an' we have got ter bring 'em up with a round turn. We won't feel in ther sperret fer much sarmonizin' till after that leetle job heve been done."

"Then they are a band of outlaws, if I understand you aright."

"Jest so. An' they holds human life as of no more vally than a chaw of terbakky."

"And are you sure that this was their work? What proof have you that it was done by them? May it not have been done by others—"

"Great gophers!" broke in Hikey Hen, "don't it speak fer itself? Ain't it jest erbout horrible enough ter ho' been ther doin's of that Devil Duval? Yer don't know him, parson. Besides, a note in ther hat proves it wur him."

"Ha! that is different. There was a note in the hat, eh? What was it? You see I am interested, and I don't know who wouldn't be. It is the most horrible thing I ever saw in my life. Is it a note from the outlaw, acknowledging it to have been done by himself and his evil followers?"

"That's about ther size of it, parson," affirmed Hard-head. "An' hyar are what ther note has ter say:

With that, he read the note aloud again.

"Dick Darrel," the stranger repeated, musingly; "I am not sure that I have not heard that name before."

"That's who it are," spoke up Hikey Hen. "I see'd ther feller over ter Burnt Match, where he had ther set-to with ther outlaws, an' this hyar are him, sure as can be."

"You are sure of that, my man?" and the stranger turned upon him with quick interest. "You saw him yourself, you say?"

"Great gophers! In course I'm sure!" cried Hikey. "Wasn't I right thar, on one of my perryoddykill round-ups? An' didn't I see him, an' ther outlaw, an' ther hull blame kit of 'em?"

"That being the case, there seems to be no mistake about it. Not that I care one way or the other, you know, fellow-sinners; but I suppose you will want to hear me preach a funeral over this poor fellow's head, and it is just as well to know who he was."

"I opine that would be about the proper caper," agreed Hard-head, "an' mebbey ther boyees will allow ye to orate when we gets ready ter plant it."

"But in ther mean time," observed Tony Gallagher, "I'd say put ther thing on exhibit fer ther day, in some 'spicuous place."

"That's ther racket!" agreed Hikey Hen. "Mebby you'd like ter have it in yer saloon windy fer ther day?"

"Nixey!" objected Tony, promptly. "It are plenty clost enough, right whar it is now."

"Then how would it do," the stranger suggested, "to stand it on a tall box and leave it right here for a time? What could be more suggestive of the uncertainty of life and the certainty of death? It would be a silent sermon all day long."

"That's ther proper caper, by tarnell!" agreed Hard-head. "That's what we'll do, feller-pards. An' we'll put this hyar note on ther box, an' if it don't create a big stir against Devil Duval, then I miss my guess, that's all. What do yer say to ther properzishun, boyees?"

The plan was agreed to at once, and immediately they set about carrying it into effect.

And the stranger, having dismounted, hitched his mustang to a post before the saloon and watched the proceedings with a show of interest.

Had any one noticed closely, there was the suggestion of a smile about his lips, with a turn at the corners of the mouth that might have been taken to be cynical, sneering.

From in front of the one store of the camp, not far away, were taken three boxes, one quite a large case, the next about half as large, and a small one for the top. And these were speedily brought to the middle of the Plaza and arranged in that order, and the severed head placed on top.

That done, the note was posted on the side of the middle box, on the side toward the saloon, in which direction the face of the severed head was set.

"An' now," suggested Hikey Hen, "how would it do ter put ther hat on top of ther head?"

There were a few reckless spirits who were in favor of this, but it was ruled down.

By this time the first horror was past, but that was carrying things too far.

"It won't do," declared Hard-head. "It's makin' too light of a grave subjeck. Don't yer think so, parson?"

"Yes," the parson promptly agreed, "I do. Nothing in life is so solemn as death, and it would be a disgrace to your town to have that head standing there with a hat on."

Suddenly Hard-head Hugh recollected that he had not yet had his morning bitters, or bracer-up, and turning to Tony, exclaimed:

"Come, Tony, I'm late. Had almost forgot my regulator. I thought there was a feelin' of goneness in my middle regions. I must take my bitters at once. Parson, s'pose thar's no use invitin' you—"

"Tempt me not!" the stranger exclaimed, interrupting. "I look not upon the wine when it is red. What I need just now is a place of repose."

"Then ther Round-up Saloon are jest ther place yer wants," assured Tony, "fer it are hotel and saloon combined, an' can't be beat."

"And you are the proprietor of the place, sir?"

"That's what I am, stranger."

"And you can give me lodging for myself and beast?"

"You bet."

"Then I look no further. I will put up with you, and will retire to rest as soon as you can let me have a room. I have been out most of the night, and am tired almost to death."

Leaving the main portion of the crowd still surrounding the hideous object on the Plaza, these and others repaired to the saloon, where Tony Gallagher shoved out a homely, home-made register for the stranger to inscribe his name.

This the stranger did, and those who looked at the name he wrote—and they all looked, as soon as he had done, read—"Rev. Ray Wallyngton, Pennsylvania." And while Hard-head was imbibing, and the others were inspecting the register, the parson was shown to his room.

Once there, and the door closed, he looked out from the window at the crowd on the Plaza. A hard, grim smile came upon his face, but it soon gave place to that other expression, that expression of which it has already been said that it was hard to define. For some minutes he stood looking at the severed head, but presently turned away, threw himself upon the bed, and was soon sound asleep.

CHAPTER V.

ANOTHER NEW-COMER.

PARADISE POCKET was a mining-camp, and owed its existence to the fact that the Gilt-edge Mine was a paying institution.

This mine was a stock concern, was paying big dividends, and employed something over a hundred men. It was considered the best paying mine in that section, with no exception.

Besides this mine, there was panning in the creek below the camp that paid fairly well, and altogether the camp numbered perhaps three hundred souls. It was a lively place, for its size, as has been hinted, and a wild one, too, full of roughs and toughs. Indeed most of its citizens were as untamable as tigers when there was occasion for them to "show their teeth." And of these tough customers, Hugh Hogan, him whom we have introduced as "Hard-head Hugh," was about the toughest. Next to him, as a "hard customer," stood Tony Gallagher, familiarly known as "Tony the Tough."

Now these "tough" citizens of an acknowledged "tough" camp had always considered themselves invincible, and having cherished that idea so long, they had become thoroughly and truly convinced that it must be so; hence, deep was their secret chagrin and bitter their reflections at the defiance of Devil Duval and his Devil's Picked Dozen.

At the head of affairs at Paradise Pocket was Colonel Jim Hoxley, manager and superintendent of the Gilt-edge Mine—not only manager and superintendent, but held that relation to the camp as well, with respect to his standing and influence there, for he was the conceded "boss." He it was who had offered the reward for the outlaw, following the example of other camps at the time.

And so it was, after the coming of the outlaw band, and the high-handed manner in which they had flung defiance into the teeth of the citizens, that Colonel Jim was the sorest man of them all.

Immediately after that night's excitement he had raised the reward another thousand. And if any citizen of the camp was determined that Devil Duval should suffer for the ruin wrought there, and be brought to the "business end" of a rope, he was the man.

Colonel Jim was not an early riser. He had rooms furnished over the office of the mine, and that was a little distance out of the camp. It was his rule to reach the Round-up Saloon in time for breakfast every morning, however, and he never missed.

So it happened that about half an hour after the severed head had been placed in position on the Plaza, he came up from the mine, and as he turned into the Plaza, the boxes immediately caught his eye, and when he saw the horrible object that rested upon them, an imprecation of anger escaped him.

Running forward, he was soon in the crowd, demanding:

"What in ruin does this mean?"

The facts of the case were speedily laid before him.

When he had heard all, Colonel Jim raved around like a mad hornet.

"By ruin!" he shouted, "but this business has got to be stopped! This is a dirtier insult than the other was, by long odds! Men of Paradise, are we going to put up with it? Not if Jim Hoxley knows himself!"

Into the Round-up he rushed, snatched down from the wall the placard he had posted there, the same one that had been filled full of holes by the outlaws, and the figure of which he had already once raised; and over the "2" he now printed a big "5."

"There!" he cried. "There! We'll see if that will do any good. If it don't I'll lift it another notch. We'll show the cut-throat that he can't come any of his Burnt Match games with this camp. I don't want you to be without your guns a minute, men, not even when you're asleep. If the cusses come here again we'll give 'em the warmest reception they ever had, by ruin!"

Carrying the placard out of doors, and to the boxes on the Square, Colonel Jim tacked it to the top box, just below the head.

"Dick Darrel," he said, looking at the severed head pityingly, "you shall be avenged, if this camp has the power and grit to do it. Let your enemy show his head here just once more—if he dare!"

This met the approval of the crowd, and all together they echoed their determination to carry out to the letter the vow their leader had taken.

"Let him come hyar only wunst more," cried Hard-head Hugh, as he bristled up and glared around, "an' he'll come ter stay."

"Bet yer life on't!" assented Tony the Tough. "He'll never ketch us ergain in ther like way as he did ther t'other time. We'll be p'pared fer him."

"Great gophers!" chipped in Hikey Hen, "I should say so! Hyar's five pills in this hyar gun o' mine, each one as big as a barrel in p'portion ter weight, an' if they wouldn't do bad mischief I'd like ter know why."

These and various other observations and treats went the rounds of the crowd, and the men of Paradise Pocket meant it, too. Their blood was up to the seething point.

That hideous object on the top of the boxes had a fascination about it, and the crowd could not seem to get away from it. Instead of growing less, it had been considerably augmented, until now almost if not quite the whole population of the camp was congregated on the Plaza in front of the saloon, staring at the dread spectacle with morbid curiosity.

And so intense was the interest that the arrival of another stranger was not noticed until he had advanced almost upon them.

He was a young man, not over twenty-five, apparently, and looking perhaps even younger than that. He had a smooth face, with a clear, soft skin, and hands as small, white and soft as a woman's.

Mounted upon a superb animal, with rich caparison, horse and rider made a handsome appearance as they drew near, the horse at a walk and the rider with his left hand resting upon his thigh in an easy, careless, graceful manner.

In point of attire this stranger was simply elegant. A suit of the finest blue-black silk velvet covered his shapely form, a shiny silk hat rested upon his curly head, and diamonds flashed upon the bosom of his spotless shirt and on the fingers of his left hand.

His feet, too, were equally well equipped with a pair of finest patent-leather boots, and from top to toe he was as "new" and spotless as though he had just stepped out of a bandbox. His coat was of the jacket pattern, his vest was low-cut, and a silk sash of brightest red was around his waist, falling in short loops over his left hip.

The moment he was observed, and attention called to him, every pair of eyes in the crowd was upon him.

And the next moment, almost in the same instant, it may be said, the stranger caught sight of the severed head, and a great change came over him.

With a frightful start he straightened up in the saddle, leaned forward with staring eyes, and the blood receded from his face, even from the lips, leaving him as pale as death.

The tightening of his right hand upon the rein had brought his horse to a stop, and for some seconds horse and rider were as motionless as a statue.

"Do you recognize the man's head, stranger?" inquired Colonel Jim Hoxley.

"No," was the answer, with an effort at trying to recover from the shock. "I don't; but I was almost knocked over at the horrible sight."

"It looked a good deal more as though you recognized the face," Colonel Jim declared. "It seemed to take hold of you a good deal worse than just the natural start it would give anybody."

"I will admit that it looks like some one I have seen," was the response to that, "but now I can see it is not the person. But, citizens, what is the meaning of such a horrible display as this? What's up, citizens?"

This was in almost cool and collected manner, and the horseman looked around over the crowd inquiringly.

"If yer will ride jest er leetle closter an' look at ther dokkymint on ther middle box, it will tell ther hull tale," apprised Hard-head Hugh. "Make way fer ther gent, boyees, let him sattersfy his curiosity. Ther other notiss yer kin read at longer range."

"Yes, I am taking note of that. Five thousand for the capture of Devil Duval, eh? I have heard of him. Do you mean to tell me this is some of his work?"

"That's what's the matter, mister," informed Hikey Hen. "He's ther galoot what done it, an' ther dead one are ther feller what tackled him over at Burnt Match; one Dick Darrel by right of handle, so called."

The new-comer was seen to close his lips hard, and there was a suspicious watery look about his eyes as he rode nearer to read the notice on the box, the note that had been found in the hat. Who was he? and what was his interest? These were questions the crowd was interested in, points upon which enlightenment was wanted.

CHAPTER VI.

THREE, BUT NOT OF A KIND.

"WHOAP! Batheration to yez! Phwat is it is allin' av ye, anyhow?"

A young Irishman mounted upon a big mule, roughly clad and armed with a big, old-fashioned blunderbuss.

He was riding along through a dismal and narrow canyon, and had experienced no trouble until now, when the mule was showing a decided aversion to proceeding any further.

The animal was standing with its fore feet braced, mule fashion, its neck arched and its ears set forward as though listening, and about every half-second was kicking up its hind legs in a way that threatened the rider's safety.

"May dbe devil fly away wid the loikes av ye!" the young Irishman cried. "Oi don't see anyt'ing dhat should make yez to be caperin' up loike dhis, no more Oi do. Begorra, an' yez don't be shtoppin' av it, sure it is gettin' down from here Oi'll be doin' an' lambastin' dbe stuffin' out av yez."

This did not seem to help matters a bit, and the Irishman evidently came to the conclusion that there was danger ahead, for he took his blunderbuss in hand and prepared for business.

A little distance ahead was a bend in the trail, beyond which nothing could be seen from where the rider of the hybrid was standing.

"Bad luck to yez!" the rider cried, "phwy don't ye be goin' on? Phwat is it yez have got scint av, begob!"

But at that moment the cause of the mule's uneasiness appeared around a point of rock. It was a typical Jew pack-peddler, with a pack on his back and staff in his hand.

His eyes were bent upon the ground, and he was trudging along briskly.

"Hould on there, Solomon!" cried the Irishman, bringing his big gun to his shoulder. "Av ye don't, begorra Oi'll empty more buckshot into ye dhan ye could put in yer pack."

"Mine gootness!" gasped the Jew, looking up at the first sound of the challenging voice. And when the man on the mule had ended, adding: "Vas it von robber you peen? So hellup me gootness I hafe not von toller mit mine bocket. Unt v'at I hafe in mine pack vas not vort tain saints!"

"No, begorra! it is not a robber Oi am, Solomon," responded the rider of the mule; "but it's a murtherer Oi will be, an' ye don't hurry along an' get yersel out av dbe soight an' smell av me mule critter. Sure it is a delicate sinse av smell he has, an' dbe scint av ye almost paralyzes him, so it does. Don't yez be movin' now, or it is a porous plaster yez will be instantler!"

The poor Jew looked perplexed.

"So hellup Yacoop!" he ejaculated, "v'at vas I to do? If I don't hurry me along I vas von murthered man, unt if I move me von step I vas a borous blaster. Pones of Choseph! v'at vas I to do?"

The young Irishman's conflicting orders were rather puzzling, and now that he saw it he had to smile.

"Sure dbe only safe t'ing is to be doin' av both," he responded. "But me mule is quieter now, so Oi'll talk a bit wid ye. Phwat is dbe handle av ye? Phwere are ye goin'? An' phwat are ye goin' fur?"

"Mine gootness! mine gootness!" the peddler exclaimed, "v'at peesness of mine vas dot? You ton't vas look like von robber, but py chin id vas information you vas after, ain't it? V'at for you vant mit mine name?"

"Begorra! but ye nade not get on yer ear about it," cried the Irishman. "Oi only wanted to be sociable wid ye, while me mule got enough accustomed to ye so dhat Oi might pass ye by in safety to dbe neck av me, dhat's all. Oi don't want to know yer name, an' ye don't want me to, begob!"

He had lowered his gun, and was still smiling broadly, even while he spoke so bluntly.

"Vell, vell, I ton't vas got mat, if you ton't," the peddler conceded. "You tolt me your name unt I giff you mine," and the peddler backed up to a boulder and rested his pack on it, while he crossed his hands on the top of his staff in front of him.

"Dhat's fair enough, begob!" agreed the man on the mule. "My name is Barney O'Linn, at yer service. Oi have just come from forninst," with a jerk of his thumb over his shoulder, "an' Oi'm goin' beyanst," pointing ahead.

"Dot vas a good enough name ver an Irishman, py chin id vas!" the peddler exclaimed. "But I pet you I can peat him von unt go him some petter. My name vas Abraham Yacoop Isaacs. How high vas dot vor a name, hey? I tells you I vas broud I vas a Chew, mit such a name as dot!"

"Begorra, but Oi should t'ink yez would be!" exclaimed Barney. "Sure Oi would have to call mesel' Saint Patherick Shamrock Oirland, to

hold a candle to ye. Pawere are ye headin' fur, Mr. Isaacs?"

"Pless me, mine frient," the Jew returned, "I hope you can tolt me dot py mine self. I vant to go py a blace named Baradise Bocket. You know vhere id vas?"

"Begob, Oi am in dbe same fix mesel', so Oi am!" Barney exclaimed. "Oi want to go dhere, but don't know phwether Oi am on dbe roight road or not."

"Den id vas a case of a plind man lead a plind man, I dake id. Id vas pcoy sure von of us must peen wrong, bey?"

"That is dbe way it looks. Oi don't t'ink Oi'll change me direction, however."

"Yoost der same like dot I vas, too," declared the Jew. "I hafe come me py seex goot miles, if I hafe come von, unt I don't turn me back no-how."

"Dbat is jest phwat's dbe matther wid me, too," cried Barney. "Oi have come foive molles in dhis hole av a canyon av Oi have come wan, an' Oi wouldn't turn back fur a dollar, no more Oi would."

"Unt you vill hafe to go yoost so much funder pefore you gits him out mit, too," the Jew informed. "I hafe peen lookin' vor der eend of der hole vor an hour or more, unt now you dells me id vas yoost so fur as id vas pefore I started. Py chin, dot makes me veel tired!"

At this comical way of expressing what he meant, Barney O'Linn had to laugh.

And as we pause, a word of description concerning the Jew peddler may not be out of place.

Concerning Barney O'Linn, something has been said already, and he has added enough more by his own doings, to make it needless to say anything further.

The Jew was a man of uncertain age, being anything between twenty-five and forty. He was dark, had black hair and eyes and a beard to match. His apparel consisted of a worn suit of rough texture, much too large for him.

He was a sturdy-looking fellow, strong of limb, evidently, and well proportioned. There was nothing striking about his appearance; he was simply a Jew peddler of the usual type, without anything strongly in his favor and with nothing in particular against him. His appearance told the story.

"Begorra you'll feel a good dale more tired before ye come to dbe end," the young Irishman exclaimed, in response to the last remark. "Yez had bettber turn about an' come along wid me."

"Mine gootness, no!" the Jew exclaimed. "I would not go back ofer mine tired stebs vor tain tollars! It would preak mine heart if I had to. I am yoost so likely to be right as you vas, unt I goes me mine own way. You had petter come along mit me, unt I peen gompany vor you."

"Nixey!" Barney cried. "Not dhat Oi would object to it mesel', ye know, but me mule here would never agree to it in dbe wurreld. Av dhere is wan t'ing more dhan another dhat me mule critter don't loike, it is to turn about and take dbe back trail. Phwy, av Oi was to thry dhat, Solomon— No, beg yer pardon; I mean Abraham. Av Oi was to thry dhat, sure he would balk, so he would, and Oi'd be unable to make him go ayther wan way or dbe other."

"Vell, if dot vas so ve must bart gompany, I suppose."

"It looks dhat way, begob. Shoulder yer pack an' mosey on, now, while me mule critter is behavin' av himsel'."

The Jew obeyed, and had risen with his pack and taken a firm grip upon his staff, preparatory to trudging on his way, when the sound of hoofs was heard.

Looking up the canyon in the direction from which the young Irishman had just come, the two men beheld a horse and rider advancing toward them at a walk, and the rider was a woman in black, closely veiled.

Neither spoke, but waited for the woman to come up.

She soon reached them, and drawing her horse to a stop, and without lifting her veil, inquired:

"Can you tell me the right direction to Paradise Pocket, gentlemen?"

Immediately Barney and the Jew began to dispute about the matter, soon proving to the woman that neither of them knew any more about the trail than she knew herself.

"I see you are both strangers here, like myself," she presently interrupted. "As you are mounted, however, sir," to Barney, "I will go along with you, if you do not object, since I see you are headin' in my direction. We must come out somewhere, sooner or later."

To this Barney immediately agreed, and when

some further words had been exchanged with the Jew, they set forward, leaving the Jew gazing after them until they had disappeared around the bend.

CHAPTER VII.

BARNEY O'LINN'S RECOGNITION.

WHEN they had passed out of sight the peddler shook his head.

"Py shinminy!" he muttered, "dot vas von creat Irishmans! Unt dot vomans—v'ot I makes out mit her? I pelief me I hafe heard dot voice somedimes pefore alreaty."

For some moments he stood gazing blankly at the place where he had last sen the pair, and then with a sigh he adjusted his pack upon his shoulders, took a firm hold of his staff, and went off up the canyon.

And for the present we take our leave of him, as well as of Barney O'Linn and his unknown companion, and return to the camp for which they were aiming, taking up the thread of our romance at the point where it was laid down at the closing of a preceding chapter.

When the handsome stranger-sport—for a sport his appearance had immediately stamped him in the minds of the citizens of the camp—had satisfied his curiosity regarding the notice on the box, and had taken a long and searching look at the features of the severed head, he turned away, backing his horse out of the crowd.

"Well, do you recognize the face?" Colonel Jim Hoxley inquired again.

"No, I do not," was the answer, as before. "By the notice, though, I learn it is the head of one Dick Darrel."

"Jest as I tolt ye," Hikey Hen chipped in. "I was thar at ther time of ther diffikilty, an' see'd him. He's ther feller, an' no mistake about that."

The stranger turned an inquiring look upon Mr. Hoyke, but offered no response to him direct.

"Well, it is a pity that such work as this must be tolerated," he remarked to the crowd. "How much longer are you going to allow this reign of terror to continue, citizens?"

"But a mighty little while, I can tell you, if there is any way of bringing it to an end!" cried Colonel Jim. "We had just taken the vow, as you came up, that we would avenge this poor fellow if possible."

"Good for you!" the stranger approved. "What is your idea, though, citizens, in putting the horrible thing up here in this fashion? But perhaps this is the way you found it. What are you going to do with it? It's a terrible sight, where it is."

"We know it are," agreed Hard-head Hugh, "an' we has got it thar with a purpose. We wants ter git this hyar camp roused right up ter fever pitch against ther outlaw an' his p'izen crew, an' if they comes hyar again we're goin' ter sallyvate 'em wuss 'n yer kin think. Hey, Colonel Jim?"

"That's the idea," the colonel agreed. "We will leave it here to-day, though it will undoubtedly create a terrible excitement when the stage arrives. But, as Hugh says, it will serve to rouse public indignation to the highest pitch against the outlaw, and with this reward I have offered, something may be done toward winding up his career of crime."

"An' then we're goin' ter plant it with all honors," added Hikey Hen. "We has got a gospel sharp hyar, an' he's goin' ter spout a sarmount over it when we git ready ter put it under ther sod."

"A gospel sharp—a preacher you mean?" the elegant sport inquired, looking again at Mr. Hoyke. "Who is he? This is the last place in the world where one would expect to find a parson."

"He's a stranger," explained Tony Gallagher—"came into the camp only a short while ago, an' is now abed. Was purty well tuckered out when he arrived."

"Thought it must be a new arrival, one I hadn't heard about," observed Colonel Jim, who had shown interest in Hikey Hen's statement.

"Yas; he kem erlong afore you got hyar," informed Hard-head. "Sot his name down as Rev. Ray Wallyngton, I b'lieve."

"Thet war it," attested Tony. "But, come, Colonel Jim," he added, "thar's ther call ter breakfast."

The time, from the first discovery of the severed head to the then present, had passed so quickly that it had seemed no more than a few minutes. In truth it was more than two hours.

Now the loud sound of the breakfast tocsin,

from the rear of the saloon, reminded the crowd of the flight of time, and there was an immediate breaking up, the citizens going off in various directions to fortify themselves with their morning rations.

There still remained a goodly number on the Plaza, however, for the hideous object at the apex of the pyramid of boxes had such a fascination for many that they were loth to break away.

Colonel Jim and several others followed Tony into the saloon, and after them rode the stranger sport, and entered the place, still mounted.

Hearing the heavy tread of the horse's hoofs on the floor behind them, Tony and the others turned in surprise.

"Don't mind a little thing like this, gentlemen," remarked the stranger, with a smile.

"But we does mind it, though," Tony complained. "This hyar ain't no stable."

"Well, we won't argue the point," was the smiling return. "If you can accommodate me with food and lodging, and care for my horse, you may have him led out to his proper quarters."

"I can do that," Tony assured.

The stranger slipped from the saddle, delivering the rein to a fellow who stepped forward to receive it, and at the same time giving him a piece of money, with the injunction to see that the animal was well cared for.

His horse was led out and away. Tony assuring him that it was in good hands, and when it had left the room the sport turned to the register which Tony had shoved out toward him.

Taking up the pen, he held it idly for a moment while he glanced at the names already recorded. The latest on the list seeming to claim his attention.

His pause, or hesitation, was only brief, however, and dipping the pen he put his signature on the page with a bold flourish.

No sooner was it down than those around him craned their necks to learn what his name might be.

In this they were disappointed, for the sport had not written his name, but a sobriquet—"Blue-velvet Burt."

"Durn me if ther handle don't fit yer well!" exclaimed Hard-head, who had almost looked over his shoulder as he wrote it out.

"What are ther title he gives himself, Hard-head?" sung out Hikey Hen, who held a less favored position. "Spout it out, so's we'll know what ter call ther gent."

"I am called Blue-velvet Burt, gentlemen," the velvet sport announced, speaking for himself. "And further, if you have any curiosity to know what my calling is, I'm a card-sharp of the first water. Look out for me."

This was ended with a light laugh, and the sport turned away from the end of the bar where he had registered, asking in the next breath the way to the breakfast-room.

The way having been pointed out, the sport went from the bar-room, leaving those there assembled to comment upon him as they pleased.

And comment was lively enough, as may be safely guessed, though little of it was worthy of being repeated here.

At the table Colonel Jim Hoxey fell into conversation with the stranger sport, sounding him.

Before he had done he was satisfied that the young man was no "tenderfoot."

After breakfast, as Colonel Jim did not go to the mine, and as everybody else was waiting for him to lead, nobody went, and the mine did not start up.

Excitement at Paradise Pocket was too great for business or work to be thought of that morning. Within half an hour the whole population of the camp had reassembled on the Plaza.

And there the citizens remained, a great crowd around the boxes upon which rested the horrible "find," others in groups not far away, and all within plain sight of the dread object. And the main drift of talk was toward vengeance upon the Devil's Picked Dozen.

Some time passed, without much change in the situation, when somebody called attention to two new arrivals who were approaching.

One was a man, mounted upon a big mule, and armed with a formidable-looking apology for a gun, while the other was a woman in black, closely veiled and riding upon a horse.

They were Barney O'Linn and his strange companion, as the reader need not be told.

As they came nearer, their curiosity was awakened at sight of the crowd, and when they had approached nearer still, an excited exclamation fell from Barney's lips.

He had caught sight of the severed head, and recognized it immediately as that of Dick Darrel, the master whom he served, and for whom

he would almost have laid down his life. With an almost cry, he urged his mule forward to within a few paces of the boxes, and looked long and earnestly at the face.

CHAPTER VIII.

ANNOUNCING THE FUNERAL.

THE woman had stopped further back.

She, too, appeared to take interest in the awful thing.

It could not be guessed, though, whether hers was more than a natural thrill of horror at the sight.

As she was so completely veiled, no one could form any opinion as to what she was like, much less guess what her emotions were at sight of the head.

She stood only a moment where she had stopped, and only for a moment looked upon the dead face, but turned her horse toward the saloon, rode up to its door and dismounted and entered, but Barney O'Linn remained, still staring at the severed head.

At his first sight of it, an expression of keenest horror had come upon his face. When he drew nearer, however, that expression had suddenly changed—changed to one which it was not easy to interpret.

For some moments he was silent and motionless, his expression gradually resolving into one of keenest sadness, and presently he turned away with a sigh.

"I takes it you knowed ther defunct, hey?" Hikey Hen addressed him.

"Oi did dhat same," Barney dolefully declared. "Sure, it is all dhat is left av me mas-ther, Dick Darrel."

"Durn it, I thought I knowed you," Hikey Hen cried. "Ain't you ther feller what was with him at Burnt Match? If yer ain't I'm a galoot, that's all."

"Oi am dhat same, sor," Barney acknowledged. "An' sorry dhe day dhat brought me here to see him at such an end as dhis. It is too bad, too bad, so it is. Poor b'y, he was as thrue as gold an' as bold as a lion, so he was."

With that Barney drew his sleeve across his eyes as though to mop away his tears, though no one had noticed any.

"Then you had parted company with him, hey?" inquired the questioning Hoyke. "How comes it he drifted over this way?"

"Sure he was p'izen death afther dhat murderin' villain av a Devil Duval, so he was, an' Oi suppose he has follyed him up to his sorry. Och! it is too bad, too bad, an' him so young and so fine a lad as he was."

And with that the other sleeve went across his eyes, and Barney certainly looked as though he had lost his best and only friend.

"You are sure about your identity of the man, are you?" demanded Colonel Jim, he being right at hand.

"Do yer think Oi wouldn't know Dick Darrel, dead or alive?" was Barney's quick counter-demand. "Begorra, Oi would know him av he was naythur!"

This provoked a smile, but Barney looked around as sober as a judge, as if seeking some one who might be willing to challenge him further upon that point. His assertion was certainly positive.

"So then yer had parted company, had yer?" Hikey still insisted.

"Av coorse Oi had, ye hairy gossoon!" Barney retorted, somewhat snappishly. "Av Oi hadn't, wouldn't Oi be wid him? Phwat's dhe matter wid ye?"

"Can you tell us anything about him, my man?" asked Colonel Jim, more quietly. "We want to learn when and where he was killed, if we can. We are determined upon avenging his death."

"Dhere, now dhat is somet'ing loike!" Barney cried. "Sure we had parted company, so we had, an' he tould me to meet him up in dhis last end av dhe wurreld in about two weeks, an' here Oi am. But, dhe poor b'y, sorry dhe meetin' it is fur him, to be here alone widout any av dhe rest av himsel', an' dead at dhat, och hone!"

It was not to be doubted that the young Irishman's grief was genuine, for his manner, tone, and every action went to prove it; but his oddities of speech provoked smiles at his expense.

The blue velvet sport, standing on the saloon stoop—rather platform, was paying close attention to all that was passing, the tones being plenty loud enough to reach his hearing.

And while Barney was speaking, out of the saloon stepped the first arrival of the day, Rev. Ray Wallyngton, who had finished his rest and had also just taken in a solid repast.

At sight of Barney, a flash of recognition ap-

peared for a moment in his eyes, but it was gone again immediately, and he was a seemingly idle observer, nothing more.

But he had an interest of some sort in this severed head, as we know. What was his interest?

Barney had many other questions to respond to, but presently there was a break, and he demanded to know the meaning of the awful exhibition.

The matter was explained to him, and the reason given for the keeping of the head there on the Plaza in such plain sight.

"Well, ye may be roight," he reluctantly acquiesced, "but it goes against dhe grain av me to be seein' av me masther's head exposed to dhe public gaze loike dhat. Oi will l'ave ye have it dhere till four o'clock, however, an' dhen it is dacintly buried it must be. Moind dhat, citizens, every wan av ye."

"Your wishes shall be respected," promised Colonel Jim. "At four o'clock, boys, the severed head shall be taken down for burial."

"And I will hold myself in readiness to preach the sermon, as I have promised to do," spoke up the parson, having stepped forward from the front of the saloon.

Instantly Barney O'Linn turned his gaze upon him, and for a moment searched him keenly, as though he thought the voice was familiar.

If he had so thought, however, he evidently decided that he had been mistaken, for he soon turned away.

With another sorrowful look at the severed head, he turned his mule to the saloon, rode forward and dismounted, and throwing the rein over a post, entered the place.

"Begorra," he saluted there, "av ye have anyt'ing to ate, Oi want it. And Oi suppose it is dhe same wid me mule. Can ye be doin' av anyt'ing for us in dhis respect, Misther Landlord?"

Tony allowed he could, and Barney and the mule were soon being cared for in the manner that best answered their needs.

In the mean time the veiled woman had registered and gone to the room that had been assigned to her.

The Round-up Saloon, by the way, had quite a number of rooms over the saloon proper. These rooms were eight by ten, in point of size, except those in front, which were a little larger.

It was one of these latter that had been given the veiled sojourner, another of them being already occupied by the recently arrived "gospel-sharp." And there being only three of the larger rooms, only one remained, the middle one, to which the blue-velvet sport held right of title.

The woman had registered as Mrs. Chintley, of Denver, and had incidentally let fall the information that she was a widow, and that she was looking for some information concerning property her husband had held somewhere in that wild region.

She had not drawn much attention, for her somber attire was rather repelling than otherwise, and after she had gone to her chamber little thought was given her.

It was not so with the elegant sport, Blue-velvet Burt, who was the center of attraction wherever he moved.

It was some time after the arrival of Barney O'Linn and the strange woman, and the forenoon was quite far advanced, when the sport was in the saloon, toying idly with a pack of cards.

Several of the *habitués* of the place were looking on, watching to see what he intended to do. But nothing seemed to be in the sport's mind, and he merely toyed with the cards, shifting them deftly from hand to hand, as if unconsciously.

Finally Colonel Jim Hoxley remarked:

"I believe you made the statement, sir, that you are a card-sharp. I suppose you must be bandy with the boards."

The sport smiled.

"Well, I know a thing or two about them," he modestly affirmed. "I can do a few clumsy tricks with them, and as to playing—well, that is my regular business, and I do not look like a beggar, do I?"

"Well, no, hardly," Colonel Jim had to admit. "But you say you can do some tricks with the papers; let's see one or two, if you don't mind, to pass the time till the arrival of the stage."

"Anything to oblige," was the ready agreement. "Just favor me by drawing a card from the pack, will you, sir?"

While speaking, the sport had shuffled the cards briskly, and now presented them to the colonel, face down and slightly spread. The colonel drew one out and looked at it, and the

sport requested him to take the pack, put the card back into it and shuffle them. And these directions Colonel Jim followed, replacing the card and giving the pack a thorough shuffling.

CHAPTER IX.

THE CARD SHARP'S SKILL.

THE sport was now the center of interest.

Everybody in the room had pressed forward to where he sat, and a circle was formed around him and Colonel Jim.

In the crowd were Hard-head Hugh, Hikey Hen, Barney O'Linn and others, and even the stranger parson was looking on from the outer edge.

Tony Gallagher was interested, too, and was viewing the proceedings from the end of his bar. All were anxious to see what was coming, and as the colonel had challenged the sport, something good was expected.

When Colonel Jim had done shuffling the cards, he handed them back to the velvet sport, remarking:

"I don't know what the trick is, Blue-velvet Burt," with a confident smile, "but if you can pick out that card you are a good one."

"I am not going to try to pick it out," was the response, as the sport gave the cards a swift running over. "I will let it jump out of the pack of its own accord, and save myself that trouble."

Without pause, then, he held the cards a little distance above the table, allowed the pack to drop, and as it struck the board one of the cards was seen to turn over, face up.

This card was the ace of spades.

"That is the card you drew out, sir," the sport observed, positively.

"Right you are!" the colonel exclaimed in acknowledgment. "How in the deuce did you do it?"

"By a simple twist of the wrist, sir," was the cheerful response. "But, that was hardly worthy to be called a trick. We will try it again. Please draw out another card, and take careful note what it is."

He held the cards out invitingly as before, and the colonel drew one, holding his hand over it in such a way that the sport had no opportunity to see the back of it, if that was the secret of his trick; but it was not, for the cards were new and "straight."

Having drawn a card, Colonel Jim looked at it, and allowed some of those behind him to see what it was.

"Take the pack and shuffle as before," directed the sport.

This was done. The colonel replaced the card, giving the pack a desperate mixing.

"I defy you to find it out this time," he said, as he gave the cards back. "I guess it will puzzle you a little."

The only response was the same confident smile.

Shuffling the cards idly for a moment, the sport suddenly clapped the pack between his hands, crying:

"Presto, change! Begone!"

"Ha!" exclaimed the colonel, "I guess we've got you."

"Not by any means," was the answer, quietly. "The card was the two of clubs."

The look of amazement on the faces of the colonel and those to whom he had exhibited the card proved that this was correct.

"By tarnation!" cried Hard-head Hugh, "but you are ther dickens with ther flippers. I'd give a dollar ter know how yer does it; I would, by tarnation!"

"Great gophers! I should say he do!" chimed Hikey Hen. "Thet 'ar is ther best I ever did see. Stuff me fer a wild turkey if I ever see'd ther beat o' that, an' I guess none o' ther rest of yer ever did."

"It is certainly astonishing," agreed Colonel Jim. "I'll give you ten dollars, sport, if you'll teach me these two tricks. Yes, I'll give you twenty-five. You told us you are a sharper at cards, and it looks like it. I wouldn't care to play against you for money."

"Sorry I can't oblige you," was the response, "but I do not sell my tricks at any price. But you have not seen all of this one yet, gentlemen. You heard me say 'Presto, change! Begone!' That card is not now in the pack. One of you please run them over and see that what I tell you is the fact."

"Give 'em hyar," cried Hard-head, "an' I'll do it."

The cards were given into his hands, and he soon announced that the two of clubs was indeed missing.

"Now," remarked the sport, receiving the cards again, "the natural question is—Where is

that card? I will tell you where it is. It is in this gentleman's hat."

He indicated Colonel Jim Hoxley.

Colonel Jim looked amazed, as well he might. "Get out!" he cried. "That's impossible. I know better."

"But I tell you it is, sir," the sport quietly insisted, smiling. "Look and see if it isn't."

"This is carrying a joke pretty far," the colonel parleyed. "How could that card get in my hat, and the hat on my head all the time?"

"That's what we all want ter know," cried Hikey Hen. "It can't be did, an' I'm bettin' my pile on it."

"Show us yer hat, anyhow, Colonel Jim," requested Hard-head. "That will settle the pint."

"Yes, that is the only proof," said the sport. "It will settle it one way or the other."

"Well, I'll settle it, then," the colonel consented. "I know it can't be there—"

He had jerked off his hat while speaking, and glancing into it, suddenly stopped.

There, under the inner band of the hat, was the missing card!

"Be it thar?" inquired Hikey Hen.

"Be it?" urged Hard-head.

"It certainly is here," the colonel had to admit, drawing it out. "My man," to the sport, "you must be in league with the devil!"

Blue velvet Burt laughed lightly.

"Nothing of the sort, gentlemen," he assured. "It is very simple when you know how to do it. Are you satisfied with what I have shown you of my skill with the wicked pasteboards?"

"Yes, I am thoroughly satisfied," declared Colonel Jim. "You have a right to the title you claim—a card-sharp."

"Jest let me draw a kyard out o' thet 'ar pack, will yer?" Hard-head Hugh requested. "I want ter see if yer kin do thet 'ar again, by tarnation!"

"Anything to be obliging," was the response.

"Draw out one, sir; any one you please, and show it around among your friends. I will try and satisfy you if I can, in my poor way."

He had shuffled the cards anew, and held them out to Hugh in fan-shape, as on the other trials. Hard-head was particular, and made his choice with care, selecting a card from near the bottom of the pack, having to part the pack to get at it.

He took good care not to let the sport see any part of it, and after looking at it himself, showed it to others, the sport idly shuffling the pack while he waited for its return.

When Hard-head turned to give it back, the sport opened the pack and told him to slip the card in, and Hugh obeyed. Then, not satisfied, he took the cards and mixed them, same as Colonel Jim had done. A waste of time and endeavor.

That done, the cards were handed back to the sport, who gave them still another shuffle, after which he proceeded to run them through his hands, looking at the face side as he did so.

"No harm to look at the faces of familiar friends, I suppose," he remarked. "I want to see that my little family are all here. Yes, here we are, all together; and now watch me closely, for I'm going to send one away. Presto!"

He held the pack up, and with that word, blew hard upon the back of the deck, at the same time giving a jerk with his hand.

"There, it is gone," he said. "You will find it in the inside pocket of our reverend friend's coat."

He indicated now the Rev. Ray Wallyngton, who was still looking on.

"Impossible!" that individual cried. "A card in my pocket! Never! I must deny it!"

The sport smiled confidently, as before, but said nothing further, and there was an immediate cry for the parson to turn out his pocket.

Mr. Wallyngton strongly objected at first, but the pressure was so great that he had to yield at last, and opening his double-breasted frock, thrust his hand into the inner pocket.

The expression of his face immediately told that he had found something, and when the hand came forth it held the queen of hearts.

"That's ther kyard, by tarnation!" ejaculated Hard-head Hugh. "I give it up, I does, sport!"

"Sure it's not in league wid dhe divil ye are," cried Barney O'Linn, "but it is dhe divil himself ye be! Give me a chance to thry me luck wanst, an' let me see av Oi can't puzzle ye a bit."

CHAPTER X.

IN THE JEW'S PACK.

THE sport glanced at Barney, and hesitated. "I don't claim to be a wizard," he said. "You may easily baffle my skill."

Barney had met his glance, and responded

that he wanted the chance to try it, anyhow, whether he could or not.

"Lave me take dhe flippers into me own hands," he requested, "and lave me select me own card, wid me back turned to ye, an' divil a bit will yez ever know phwat wan it was."

"Well," agreed the sport, "I'll do that on condition that you'll show the card you select to several persons, so that you can't deny it if I do find the right one. I want fair play, and that's all I ask in any case."

"Dhat is raysonable enough, begob," declared the young Irishman. "Dhat is phwat Oi expected to do, anyhow. Give me dhe pack, an' av Oi don't shtick yez, me name shall be Mud, an' dhat's all."

The cards were given into his hands, and turning his back to the sport he shuffled them, selected one, showed it to several of those around him, and then replacing it, shuffled again and gave the pack to its owner.

"Show me dhat card," he cried, "an' begorra it is chief ye are!"

The sport smiled, as he received the cards, saying:

"Well, I will try to do so, and this trick must satisfy you all. Let your card appear, sir."

With that, he held the pack of cards a little above the table, as in the first instance, and let it drop, when the ace of hearts appeared face up on top.

It was like the first trick he had performed, and yet in one respect it was greatly unlike it. In this instance he had not shuffled the cards at all, but held them exactly as he had received them from Barney.

The crowd looked on in open-mouthed amazement.

Here was something they could not understand.

It was the card that Barney had selected; the faces of all who had seen it proved that.

"A chief ye are, sure!" Barney cried. "Oi'll have no more to do wid ye. It is dhe Ould Boy himsel' ye are, sure enough."

The sport smiled.

"Nothing of the kind," he asserted again. "As I said, gentlemen, this will be my last trick. Now, sir," to Barney, "I will cause this card to disappear, and it shall be for you to say where it shall be found, after it has gone. Now, presto!"

He had taken up the pack, and with a quick motion with it the ace of hearts was out of sight.

"Begorra, but it is in dhe pack. It is," cried Barney.

"Take the pack and satisfy yourself as to that," was the invitation.

The young Irishman did so, running through from the first card to the last, but the one he had chosen was missing.

Just then attention was drawn to an individual who had entered the saloon; a Jew peddler, with a pack on his back and a staff in his hand.

"Bedad," Barney exclaimed, "Oi'll see how smart ye are wid dhe t'ings, so Oi will. Av ye can make dhe card appear in dhe middle av dhe pack dhat wanderin' son av Jerusalem is carryin', begorra ye can tell me dhe moon is a dishpan in dhe sky, an' Oi'll belave ye!"

"As easy to put it there as into a man's hat," was the quiet response. "It is as you desire. Make the fellow open his pack, and there you'll find the card. If it is not there I will treat the house. Go for him."

"Oi will dhat same," Barney declared, "Sure Oi met him on dhe trail as Oi was comin' here, an' a long walk he must have had av it, dhe way he was goin'. Come on, me lads, an' we'll see phwether dhe card is dhere or not."

The sport having declared that his last trick, the crowd turned from him and all attention was given to Barney and Jew.

The latter had dropped his pack to the floor, and dropped himself into a chair, as though tired out.

"Hello, Abraham, Oi see ye have got here!" Barney saluted.

"Yesh, I hafe got me here after von long dime," was the weary response.

"Oi told ye ye was on dhe wrong stretch, but ye wouldn't belave me. But come, open yer pack, will yez?"

"You vish to puy somedings?" and the fellow brightened up quickly at the prospect. "I hafe von fine azortment to show you, shentlemans, unt—"

"Oi'll tell ye phwat is the matther wid Hanner," Barney broke in. "A man here, dhat fancy shport over dhere, has been a-showin' us av some thricks wid cards, an' he says dhe last card he made to disappear, dhe ace av hearts, is in dhe middle av yer pack, and—"

"Vat for a kind of fool peesness vos dot!" the peddler cried, sinking back upon his chair again. "Dot cart vas nod in mine pack; how could he peen? Dot vas von shnide game."

"Begorra, but dhat is phwat we all say," agreed Barney. "We want to prove it, all dhe same, an' dhe only way to prove it is to have dhe pack opened. Come, now, let's be seein' av dhe inside av it. Av dhe card isn't dhere dhe sport is to threat dhe whole house, an' av it is dhere—well, maybe you'll sell some goods when dhe boys see phwat ye have got."

"Yaw, maybe dot vas so," the peddler agreed, getting up and preparing to open his pack. "I know me plame vell dot cart vas not in him, yust so goot pefore I look as I know id some oder dimes; but if I make von leedle sale, vy dot vas all righd anyhow, maypa; don't id?"

He proceeded forthwith to unbuckle the straps that held his pack in shape, and presently it was open to the public gaze.

His assortment was well chosen. There were red shirts, rough trousers, under garments, etc., such as were suitable to men in the wild camps.

"Vhere vas dot cart?" he demanded, exultingly, as he opened the pack further and further and it did not appear. "Id vas not here, yust like I said. Dot vas von fool peesness to—Ho! Py chin! Id vas here, yust so gwick like my name vas Abraham Yacoop Isaacs!"

True enough, there the card was, and the Jew drew it forth and held it up to view!

"Great gobbers!" cried Hickey Hen, "but this hyar beats ther horned toads. It do, by ther great unwashed! What d'yer think of it, parson?" to that reverend gentleman, giving him a familiar slap on the back.

"My Christian friend," was the stoical response, "the hand of the devil is in it. Cards are the devil's tools, and in this you see his hand plainly."

"That's dher way it hits me too," agreed Hard-head Hugh. "But then, I'm willin' ter go further an' say it beats ther devil."

"Well, you are satisfied, sir?" asked the sport, speaking to Barney.

"Oi am, begob!" Barney cried. "Sure Oi never saw dhe loikes av dhat."

"Unt py chin I would like to know how dot cart come mit mine pack in," the peddler questioned, still gazing at the card he had found. "Dot peats my dime. Dot vas someding v'ot I don'd vas understood. You told me how you done dot drick, mister, unt py chin I giff you von new bair socks!"

This raised a laugh immediately. The offer was so generous, and the sport look so badly in need of such a gift, that the Jew couldn't have said anything more funny if he had tried.

There was no denying that the sport's tricks had greatly mystified these men of Paradise Pocket, and they looked upon him as something just a little more than human, in his skill with the cards. Colonel Jim raised his offer to a clean hundred, if he would reveal only one of the tricks to him.

It was no use, however, for the sport would not sell his secret, and all were left to wonder over it, or think of it as they would.

And the most puzzled man of all seemed to be the Jew. He shook his head again and again, muttering:

"Dot vas peat ter tuyfel, how dot cart come mit mine pack in, unt me not to know id!"

But his attention was soon called to business, for his pack open, customers were soon found for some of the wares.

And while he was thus busy, others were talking about the tricks they had so recently witnessed, speculating upon the manner and "how" of what they had seen but could not understand.

The crowd in the saloon was growing larger, too, for it was about time for the arrival of the semi-weekly stage, and the arrival of the stage was always an event of importance at Paradise Pocket, though it frequently rolled into the Pocket without a passenger aboard.

For a time the Jew was kept busy, for he had many things the denizens of the Pocket were in need of, and the size of his pack was rapidly reduced, while the size of his money-bag increased.

But finally the cry was heard that the stage was coming, and everybody made a rush for the Plaza, to be on hand at its arrival, and the Jew made haste to do up his pack and follow their example.

CHAPTER XI.

ANOTHER WOMAN APPEARS.

THE stage was a little behind time, and came rolling into the Pocket at a lively gait.

It was the typical Overland coach, now fast

passing into the background with the advance of railroads throughout the Western wilds.

Drawn by four sturdy mules, it came rattling and clashing along as though it weighed but little and was empty at that, neither of which condition was true on this occasion.

The Jehu was perched upon his box "like a thing of life," as Barney O'Linn expressed it, noting how easily he handled the ribbons and whip as he came into the Plaza and cut a neat curve toward the Round-up Saloon.

"Whoa!" the driver sung out, throwing the "ribbons" from his hands right and left. "Hyar we is, citizens of Parrydisel! Hyar we is, an'—Great heavens!" at sight of the severed head on top of the pyramid of boxes, "what is that? Ther work of Devil Duval, do yer say?"

Some one responded and explained the situation, while everybody else looked to see who was getting out of the stage.

The first to alight was a young woman, rather fair looking but with a saddened expression.

She was plainly but serviceably dressed, and carried a small hand-bag.

Behind her followed a portly man, well-dressed.

The woman was a stranger at Paradise Pocket, as was seen at a glance, but it was not so with the man.

He was one Sidney Harcroft, and held the office of president of the Gilt-edge Mine. Colonel Jim Hoxley had been expecting him for some days.

When the woman and he were out of the stage, it could be seen that she was no companion of his, for she started at once for the saloon, on the front of which was the sign "HOTEL."

Colonel Jim had sprung forward to greet Harcroft, when the latter caught sight of the severed head, and a loud exclamation escaped him.

"Cold horrors!" he cried, "what are you doing with that dead man's head up there, Hoxley?"

So loud were his words that the woman turned to look, and as she caught sight of the face a scream came from her lips, and she trembled as if ready to fall.

For one moment she stood gazing at the hideous thing, and then, with another wild cry, she dropped her hand-bag and ran forward with outstretched arms, her eyes wild and her face like death.

Yet another scream she uttered, more wild, more piercing than the others, and fell forward upon her face, in a dead faint.

Ready hands picked her up immediately, and she was carried off in the direction of the saloon.

"Who is the woman, Mr. Harcroft?" asked Colonel Jim, quickly.

"I don't know her name," was the answer. "She told me she expected to meet her brother here."

"By ruin!" Colonel Jim cried, "maybe the dead man was her brother. She was cut up at sight of the face, anyhow, and must have recognized it."

"Yes, no doubting that. But who is the dead man? Anybody know anything about him? What's this they're saying concerning the work of Devil Duval? Let me hear about it. It's simply awful!"

The pair drew apart from the crowd, and Colonel Jim proceeded to inform Harcroft of all that had taken place.

Meanwhile the young woman had been carried into the saloon, and every means was being tried to bring her to, but without avail at first.

Blue-velvet Burt pressed his way through the crowd, to the front, and took the matter in hand peremptorily.

"Make room, citizens," he ordered, in firm, even tone. "Don't crowd too near, please."

The woman had been laid on a blanket hastily thrown on the floor.

The blue-velvet sport seemed to know just the right thing to do, and proceeding coolly and with decision, the crowd allowed him full privilege.

After a time the young woman opened her eyes, staring about with a look full of horror, her eyes still wild with the shock she had experienced. At first she was at a loss.

It soon came back to her mind, and with a cry she partly raised herself, gazing at the faces around her.

"Where is it?" she asked, excitedly. "What was it I saw? Was I dreaming?"

"I guess you were dreaming," assured the sport. "Are you better now? Here, take a drop of this."

The helpless young woman obeyed, and her strength speedily came back to her.

"It was awful!" she mused. "I thought I saw a head, his head, standing high up on something, and—"

"Whose head?" asked the sport, quietly.

There was silence all around, for everybody wanted to catch her words.

"Why, his, the man we are in search of," she said. "Isn't my brother here? I must see my brother if he has arrived. Oh!"

With the last exclamation she clapped her hand to her side, as if with pain, and swooned again.

This time, as could be seen, it was more than a faint.

"The woman is ill," the sport announced. "She must have a room at once, Mr. Gallagher. What can you do for her? But I'll tell you, we will take her up to my own room, which I will give up to her."

"Which is all I could do, bein' ter ask somebody ter make room fer her," the proprietor declared. "I haven't a single eight-by-ten left in my place. The Jew took the last one I had. We'll carry her up at once, and my wife will see to her."

No sooner agreed upon than put into execution, and the young woman was lifted and carried up-stairs.

When they reached the floor above, the strange veiled woman opened the door of her room and looked out, still veiled.

"What is the matter with the lady?" she inquired.

"She fainted at sight of that head on the Plaza," answered the sport, "and now is ill besides—in a deep swoon."

"I saw her fall, when she caught sight of the horrible thing. It must be she recognized the person—the face, I mean. Bring the poor child right into my room, and I will help care for her."

"Perhaps that is even better," the sport assented. "We'll turn her over to the care of Mrs. Chintley—the name the woman had given, as will be remembered. And if there is a doctor in the camp, landlord," to Tony, "we had better have him here."

There was a fellow in the camp who answered to that calling, and when the unfortunate young woman had been laid on the bed, the landlord and the sport withdrew and the doctor was sent for.

That this individual was—or at any rate had been—a doctor, was not to be doubted, but he had degenerated. Still he was better than none, and responded to the call.

When he came from the room, after seeing the patient, he announced that it was a complication of hysteria and nervous something-or-other, and that the woman was likely to remain partly unconscious for hours, and might die.

This was not liked, for curiosity was great to know what this woman knew about the person to whom the severed head had belonged in life, and to learn the name of the brother she had mentioned.

The doctor's diagnosis seemed to be about right, however, for as time passed the young woman only partly recovered her consciousness, raving in her talk like a person in a high fever sometimes will, though she had no fever.

And in the mean time the excitement in the town had scarcely abated and all work was suspended.

Sidney Harcroft, the mine president, had issued another offer of reward in addition to that offered by Colonel Jim Hoxley, making the combined sum ten thousand dollars.

These two, and in point of fact the whole town with them, were determined that the career of the outlaw must be brought to an end. The mine had an immense quantity of bullion to express, but it was unsafe to attempt it while this band of cut-throats was on the roads.

This was the business that had brought the president to the Pocket. The reign of terror which Devil Duval had inaugurated had deterred Colonel Jim from shipping the output, and now it had accumulated until it was a large amount.

Nor was the excitement idle and without definite object. Colonel Jim and Harcroft had organized the employees of the Gilt-edge into a Vigilance Committee, with the one object of doing battle with the rascals at first opportunity, if not indeed going for them at their rendezvous, if it could be discovered, and hunting them out.

And so matters stood, as the time passed on, but it did not look likely that the outlaws would venture into such a hornets' nest if they had any means of knowing what their reception would be if they did.

CHAPTER XII.

THE FUNERAL AND FOLLOWING.

The hour announced for the funeral came round.

Barney O'Linn was promptly on hand to carry out his intentions.

Those who had promised him support and assistance, were prompt to render it.

The severed head was removed from the pyramid of boxes, folded in a sheet and carried away.

It was carried by four men, each holding a corner of the doubled sheet, and was taken across to the south side of the pocket.

The procession was headed by the Rev. Ray Wallyngton, who carried an open ritual in hand, reading from it as he led the way—the whole population, nearly, following after.

Immediately behind the severed head walked the young Irishman, his face wearing an expression that was mournful enough.

He was chief mourner—in fact the only mourner, and played his part with all proper respect.

Arriving at the little burying-place, the parson stopped by the side of a hole which had been dug, and facing the crowd, prepared for his work of the hour.

Before he had begun, however, Barney O'Linn demanded to know whether he was a genuine minister or not.

"Av ye ain't dhe r'ale article," he declared, "begorra it is betther dhat ye have nothin' to say. Av ye are, dhen it is all roight."

"What reason have you to doubt my word?" the parson asked.

"No more rayson dhan Oi have not to doubt it," was the ambiguous response to that. "Sure it is a stranger to me ye are, and by askin' Oi have found dhat ye are a stranger here as well. All Oi want is dhe assurance dhat ye are phwat ye claim to be; nothin' more."

"Which is perfectly fair and reasonable," supported Mr. Harcroft. "It doesn't pay to accept any man on the strength of his appearance, here in the wilds, reverend sir."

"I agree with that," put in Colonel Jim. "We must have proof that you are what you claim to be, since the young man demands it."

"Yaw, dot vas pooty mooch gorreck," finished the Jew peddler, who was present out of evident curiosity.

"My friends," the parson returned, "had I imagined that my good intentions would have been so doubted, I would never have offered my services for this occasion. Since I have done so, however, I will not back out, but will furnish the proof you ask, and so satisfy you."

Sticking his ritual under his arm, he unbuttoned his coat and drew out some letters from a pocket.

These were all dated from Pennsylvania, and all agreed in a hearty recommendation of the Rev. Ray Wallyngton to the respect and confidence of people and preachers, wherever he might present them.

"There," the man asked, as he ended reading the last one, having read them aloud, "is that satisfying? If not, it is the best I can offer."

"Yaw, yaw," spoke up the Jew peddler, quickly, "dot vas all righdt. Go ahead mit der peesness of der funeral, Mister Breacher, unt let us hear vat kindt for a whooper-up you vas, anyhow."

In spite of the occasion, that remark raised a laugh.

"Yes," Barney added, "go ahead, but don't make it too long. Oi can't shtand it too heavy, aythur, moind ye."

"All right, I will touch lightly upon the matter," was the solemn response. "I will merely mention the virtues which I know must have been characteristic of the one before us—what there is of him, and lay him to rest with short service."

With that, then, he went ahead, speaking of the dead in terms that must have tickled the ears of mourning relatives, had there been any; and then winding up with a prayer and the regular ritual service.

It was a funeral such as Paradise Pocket had never had before, even if there "wasn't a whole subjeck ter spout over," as it was strikingly put.

The service ended, the head was rolled up in the sheet and laid in the grave, and the task was done.

"Py chin!" cried the peddler, "but dot peat anytings v'ot I ever seen! Id vas sometings new to blant only a man's headt, like id vas von botato."

"Right ye are, Dutchy Jew," agreed Hikey Hen. "It don't often happen; but you jest wait

around these parts till we git our claws onter Devil Daval, an' we'll plant him in sich small bits that ther general tramp-call won't never be able ter bring him together."

"Unt id vill serve him righdt, py shimminy id vill!" the peddler cried. "I veel almost vraid to trafle vid mine pack, vor fear dot schamp he go vor me unt make me mine hands bolt up like dot," illustrating, "unt den go him through mit mine pack und bocket like id vas von tose salts I peen, maybe. He vas a pad mans, unt I like to see him hang, py chin!"

"That's what's ther matter," supplemented Hard-head Hugh. "Let him come here, or show his nose within five miles of here, an' he's as good as dead."

So passed the remarks all around, while the grave was being filled, everybody having something to offer.

When the hole had been filled, a board was set to mark the spot, and on it was printed:—

"DANDY DICK DARREL,

"Killed by the Outlaw—Devil Duval."

"Poor Dick, poor Dick!" sighed Barney O'Linn, as he turned sorrowfully away, "no betther man ever lived nor phwat he was. And to' think dhat he should ever lived to see himself planted loike dhis, wid nothin' but his head! Poor Dick Darrel!"

Such a tangled manner of expressing what he meant, provoked smiles at Barney's expense, but he noted it not, being evidently too much in earnest to care anything about it.

The crowd filed back to the Plaza, from which the boxes had been cleared, many going on across and int' the Round-up Saloon.

There the doctor made the announcement that the sick young woman was better, and in her right mind.

"Yes, an' she is askin' fur her brother again, too," added Tony Gallagher.

"But, who is her brother?" asked the blue-velvet sport.

"Dot vas v'at Hannah vas der matter of!" interjected the Jew. "Who he peen, anyhow?"

"You have got too much lip, Jew," cried Tony. "Jest see if yer can't hold it down a little. Nobody asked you to chip in."

"V'at vas dot you said? I hafe me too much lip? I can't help me dot, vor I vas porn so. Py shimminy, I vould pe von creat Chew vidout any lip! But you tink I hafe me some lip! Py chia, you shust ought to seen mine vadder! He vas all lip, v'at vasn't curled up into nose; he vas, py creat!"

Tony paid no further attention to that, but responded to the sport's question.

"Why, she tells us it's ther Rev. Wallyngton," he announced.

That gentleman entered just in time to hear his name spoken.

"Who is that asking about me?" he inquired.

"Ther sick woman," answered Tony.

"The sick woman?"

"Yes; says you're her brother."

For a moment the parson's face was a study. He looked surprised, if not, indeed, greatly startled.

"Her brother!" he repeated. "There must be some great mistake!"

"Yez had ought ter know, begob," declared Barney O'Linn. "Ye have seen her."

"Beg pardon, but I haven't seen her face at all," the parson corrected. "I was not near enough when she came."

No one could say whether this was strictly true or not, for no one had paid any attention to where the man had been standing at the time in question.

"Maype you vos never had von seester," observed the Jew. "If dot vas so, den, of course, id vas a mistook, ain't id? How tender vas dot sbstrike you in some hard blaces, hey?"

"You are wrong there," was the short response.

With that, the parson dropped the Jew and turned to Gallagher.

"Has this woman registered?" he asked.

"No, I haven't got her name down yet," was the response.

"Have you heard her name?"

"I believe she's a Mrs. Wistner."

This bit of information seemed to enlighten the stranger immediately.

His face lighted up, though there was still something puzzling about it to a close observer.

"It must be shel!" he exclaimed. "I hadn't looked for her so soon, though. I will go up and see her at once."

"Dhen she is yer sisther, afther all?" queried Barney.

"Why, it must be so," was the civil reply.

"She inquired for me, it seems, and I have a sister who is Mrs. Wistner. Yes, there is no doubt about it. I will go and see her."

CHAPTER XIII.

CONFLICTING STATEMENTS.

THE blue-velvet sport left the room suddenly. Few noted this, but he went direct to his room up-stairs.

He had one of the three front rooms, as will be remembered; the middle one.

Going up with quick steps, he was in the apartment and had closed the door before the parson came up.

The partitions being only of boards, it looked as though the sport wanted to hear what was said when the brother and sister met.

Tony Gallagher having informed the man that the young woman was in the room on the side of the house opposite from his own, the parson went up and knocked at the door.

The door was opened by the woman in black, who had a short vail over her face even there, so that it was impossible to see her features. What her motive could be in keeping thus disguised did not appear.

"I am Ray Wallyngton," the parson announced. "I am told this sick woman wants to see me."

"Yes, so she does," was the answer. "Step in, sir. You are the brother she expected to meet here, undoubtedly."

"I suppose so, though she is here earlier than I looked for her."

So speaking, the man passed into the room.

The blue-velvet sport, in his apartment, had his ear glued to the wall, metaphorically.

Entering, the parson saw the woman reclining on a chair near the one window of the apartment, leaning slightly forward, and with a look of eager anticipation upon her face.

But the instant she caught sight of him her expression changed in one of amazement and questioning wonder, and she sat up straight, staring at him with eyes at their widest. Something was amiss, truly.

For a few seconds they looked steadily at each other, neither speaking.

The young woman was the first to break the silence.

"Who are you?" she demanded.

"I am your brother, sister Ruby," was the quiet answer.

The young woman's face took on a more puzzled look than ever, and her eyes held a strange light in their depths.

"You are not my brother," she positively averred.

By this time the velvet sport had discovered a small hole, a nail hole it appeared to be, through which he could command a view of the situation.

He saw the reverend gentleman smile, a smile that seemed to be half pitying.

"But I am your brother, Ruby," was insisted.

"I tell you you are not!" the young woman cried, now indignantly.

The veiled woman stood looking on, silently and apparently unmoved, as the watcher could see.

"Poor child," the man spoke soothingly, "I see your mind is not right yet. I see you do not know me."

"What are you talking about?" the young woman demanded. "Do you mean to say I do not know my own brother well enough to be sure that you are not he?"

"It speaks for itself," was the return. "I have come to you, am willing to do for you whatever you may desire, but you will not own me. I can do no more than I have done to assure you."

The young woman was nervous, trembling, and pale to the lips.

"Why do you insist that you are my brother?" she cried. "I tell you you are not. But I believe you know where he is, for truly I believe you are dressed in his clothes. Tell me, sir, where is my brother?"

At this a strange, a peculiar smile, came upon the man's face, which the veiled woman seemed to notice, for she gave a great start, barely escaping being observed.

"You see how it is," the parson observed, turning to her. "Poor Ruby's mind has not been right for some time. Partly deranged, you know."

"Helles! Oh! he lies!" the young woman exclaimed, springing up.

"Now, Ruby, be calm," the man gently remonstrated.

"Not I will not be calm!" she protested.

"You tell a lie when you say that you are my

brother, and another when you say that my mind is not right."

The veiled woman had one hand upon the foot-board of the bed, where she had taken a standing position, and the watcher could see that she was holding to it with a grip of iron.

"But did you not ask for Rev. Ray Wallyngton? and have I not come at your call as soon as it reached me?"

So the parson argued, but it was wasted breath.

"I care nothing for that," was the cry. "You are an impostor. What have you done with my brother? I recognize now his studs on your shirt and his chain on your vest, and I demand to know."

"How very unreasonable," the man sighed. "What a strange hallucination for you to be under, Ruby. How is it that you will still insist upon denying me? You know I am your brother. There is but one Ray Wallyngton, and I am he."

"You lie! You utter a fearful lie! You are no more like my brother than darkness is like light. I never saw you before in my life."

"Never saw me before! But, it is your poor weak mind again. It is the same story you told at Denver, when I came to you there—when—"

"You lie! Oh! how you lie!" the young woman almost screamed. "How can you tell me this? Where is my brother? How came you by his clothes?"

"I see it is of no use," the parson observed aside to the veiled woman. "Her mind is not right, as you can see. I will go down, and it will hardly be worth while for me to come to her again. I fear an asylum will be the best—"

"Are you a devil?" the woman screamed. "Will you drive me mad? Where is my brother? and why are you masquerading in his attire and under his name? Tell me, or I will shoot you where you stand!" and with the words she whipped a small pistol from her pocket, leveling it at his breast.

With a cry the veiled woman sprung forward and snatched the weapon away.

"I really believe you are insane!" she cried. "I can see that this gentleman must be your brother. I have no doubt of it, judging by what I have heard both of you say."

"Are you against me, too? You in whom I thought I had a friend?"

"I am your friend still. I am doing this to keep you from killing your brother."

"But, he is not my brother! I never saw him before this hour."

"And yet you admit that he has on your brother's clothes, and he certainly acknowledges the name of the man you asked for."

"But he is false—false! He is an impostor! He is—"

"I will withdraw, madam," the man spoke, with the door open to pass out. "I hope you will calm her if you can, and then some measure must be taken to get her to her home," and at once he closed the door, and hurried downstairs.

The young woman sprung up to follow him, but the other blocked her way.

"You must not go out, in your present state of mind," she said determinedly. "It will never do."

"But I will go!" cried the young woman. "You shall not detain me! I will unmask this fellow who has assumed my brother's name and character."

"And I say you shall not leave the room!" still more determinedly, and presenting the weapon she had taken from the other. "It is as your friend that I insist upon this."

"You are making yourself my worst foe, by the action you are taking. Out of my way, I say, for I am going to face this fellow, and tell what an impostor he is. I never saw him before, I tell you; I do not know who he is, but I do know that he is clad in my brother's own clothes."

With a bound, as she finished, she sprung upon the veiled woman, thrust her aside, all unmindful of the threatened pistol, and dashed from the room.

The blue-velvet sport, during all this had stood with his eye fixed to the hole in the wall, and was greatly excited, and as the young woman made this bold dash, and the veil of the other was for a second brushed partly from her face, an almost exclamation escaped his lips.

Quickly the veiled woman readjusted the veil, and ran out after the escaping young woman, following her down-stairs, and, a moment later, the sport came from his room and went after them.

His face was flushed and excited, but his manner was cool, now that he was about to enter the saloon again.

Down the young woman had rushed, and into the saloon, crying:

"Where is that man who claims to be my brother—the fellow who is passing here as the Rev. Ray Wallyngton! Men of this camp, I charge him with being an impostor for he is not the person he claims to be, though he is clad in my brother's clothes and has taken his name. Will you hear my story, gentlemen?"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE YOUNG WOMAN'S STORY.

The sport entered in time to catch the last words.

With a swift glance around the room he took in the situation, noting who was there.

The parson was at the front end of the room, as though he had been on the point of going on out, but had paused at the woman's coming.

Nearly all whose names have been mentioned so far in our romance were there, and every eye was upon the young woman, who stood pointing at the parson with accusing finger, her eyes flashing.

"Yaw, yaw," quickly exclaimed the ready Jew peddler, "dot vas id. Let us already peen hear your shdory, mine tear."

"Yas, spin us ther yarn," followed Hikey Hen. "If ther parson is a fraud, you bet we'll bounce him out of this hyar camp in short order."

"Or yank him up ter a limb," added Hard-head Hugh. "Let us hear what yer has ter say, an' then we'll see what answer ther parson has ter make to ther charge. You stay right hyar, Mr. Gospel Sharp."

At this the parson came back toward the others at the center of the room.

"I have no desire or intention otherwise," he spoke. "This woman is my sister, gentlemen of Paradise Pocket, but she is not in her right mind. She is subject to fits of insanity, and this is one. If she continues to grow worse, you will find that you will have to bind her until she is better."

"He lies! he lies!" the young woman cried in frenzy. "He is not my brother! I never saw him before! But he is clad in my brother's clothes, as I have told you, and has assumed his name. He must know something about my brother, and I call upon you to arrest him and make him tell where my brother is! Ray was to meet me here at this place, and I know something has happened to him."

"What answer do you make to that, sir?" demanded Sidney Harcroft, the mine president.

"You have heard my explanation already, sir," was the quiet, easy response. "I have shown you who I am, and I know of but one way of proving that I speak the truth and lie not."

"And what way is that?" asked Colonel Jim Hoxley.

"Why, to hold us here, and send for some person who knows us both, and all about us."

"Where is there such a person?" inquired Harcroft.

"That's the worst of it. There is no one nearer than Pennsylvania, that I know of."

"Unt py chin dot v'as gwite a stretch of vays off!" exclaimed the meddling Jew peddler. "Ton't id v'as bossiple d'ot somepody nearer py hafe seen you unt dot oder veller, mees? Dot veller v'ot you say dis mans vasn't unt he say he vas, I means."

This was addressed to the excited young woman.

"Yes, it is possible," she declared. "We stopped a day or two at a hotel at Denver, and any one who saw us there will tell you this is not the man who was with me there."

"There is nothing very insane about that sort of talk," declared Colonel Jim.

"So I think," agreed Harcroft. "I believe this matter ought to be looked into."

"Gentlemen, allow me a word," here spoke up the veiled woman. "You know this poor girl—so I will call her, for she is little more than a child; you know she has been for some hours with me in my room, and I have had a chance to study her. I had come to the conclusion that she was not right in her mind, even before her brother told me."

"Oh! how can you say that?" the young woman cried, reproachfully. "You know it is false! You have now spoiled all the kindness you showed me."

"My kindness to you, my child, was full of pity," was the response.

The parson was looking at this veiled woman in a wondering sort of way, as a close observer might have noticed.

"And you remember her shock at sight of the severed head," he now reminded. "Does it not

all go to prove that her mind is unbalanced? It was that, no doubt, that brought on this fit."

"Listen to me, gentlemen," the girl cried out. "Here is further proof that he is not the person he claims to be."

"What is the proof?" asked Colonel Jim.

"He speaks of the severed head. Were he my brother, he would know that it was the head of the man we're searching for. That man was my husband!"

"Your husband!" so more than one exclaimed. The parson's face was troubled for a second, but he immediately brought a smile to play.

"Further proof of what I charge," he insisted. "The poor child was never married in her life. She never saw that dead face before; certainly I never did. I tell you she is crazy."

"But dot shdory," put in the inquisitive Jew. "We vants to peen heard apoudt dot shdory. Ain'd dot apoud id, shentlemans?"

"That's what's ther matter!" cried Hikey Hen. "Let's have ther yarn. We'll jedge how crazy she is."

"Yes, miss, let us hear what you have to say," requested Colonel Jim, kindly.

"Very well, I will tell you all about myself," the young woman agreed. "It will not take long. I will tell everything."

"If she can keep her thoughts together," sneered the parson, aside. "She will soon prove to you the truth of what I assert."

"Well, we'll give her the chance, anyhow," responded Sidney Harcroft.

"I invite you to weigh every word I shall utter, and say whether it is the idle talk of an insane woman or not," the young woman addressed them. "I leave it for you to say."

"An' yer shall have ther verdict of ther court, straight an' squar," vowed Tony the Tough.

"All I ask is fair play, and a fair hearing. I believe I shall be able to convince you that I am not insane, as this impostor would have you believe."

"Dot vas gorreck!" cried the peddler, sticking in his oar again. "You don't vas dalk pooty much like a crazy voman, py shimminy. If der breacher vas a schinide, py chin ve hange him pooty gwick!"

"You shut up, Jew!" ordered Tony. "What right hev you ter chip in hyar? If you don't keep yer head closed we'll ride ye out of town."

"Dot vas peesness, maype, eh? I geep mine headt shut up yust so tight like von glam."

"See that you do," warned Hard-head Hugh; while at the same time Colonel Jim told the young woman to go on with her story.

"My name is Mrs. Ruby Wistner," the young woman began. "My maiden name was Wallyngton, and I have a brother who is the Rev. Ray Wallyngton. Our home is in Pennsylvania. I married a year ago much against my father's wishes. My husband, Allan Wistner by name, turned out to be a rascal. After getting my signature to some papers, which I was foolish enough to give unquestioningly, he suddenly left me, and I found then that he had robbed me of a fortune I had in bank. More, I heard that he had another wife living."

The young woman had now the attention of every person in the room, and was talking with a forced calmness.

"My father, in his anger," she went on, "turned me out of doors, and I was homeless and almost friendless. But my brother, Ray, who had some means, came to my help, and vowed that he would assist me to hunt down the rascal who had so wronged me. After a little preparation we came West, having got a clew to the whereabouts of my evil husband, and we tracked him to this part of the country. At a town some miles from here we parted company, to visit separate places, agreeing to meet again at this camp of Paradise Pocket."

Looks were being cast upon the man who claimed to be the young woman's brother, but he minded them not, standing with a confident smile on his lips.

"You know about my arrival here, and what followed," the narrator went on. "At sight of that severed head I thought I would die, for I recognized the head of the man we were in search of, as I have told you. It was the head of Allan Wistner, my husband. Do you wonder that I fainted? Not that I loved him still, for he had made me hate him; but the shock was so terrible and so unexpected that I was overcome by it. This is my story gentlemen, and I leave it to you to see that justice is done me, and some steps taken to find out what has become of my missing brother. Will you arrest this man, and make him answer?"

The accused man made it a point to be the first to speak.

"Isn't that a most improbable story," he remarked. "Why, if true, would I not have recognized the severed head at sight? On the other hand, it has been positively identified as the head of one Dick Darrel. I tell you, men of Paradise Pocket, the poor girl is not in her right mind. It is a question of truth between us, and I invite the fullest investigation, if you deem it necessary. Hold us here till you can send for some one who knows us both, and so get satisfactory proof. If you won't do that, then do what you please, but do not let my sister come to harm. If she becomes violent, as she is likely to do at any moment, then, of course, I shall take her in hand myself, as I have the right to do, being her brother."

CHAPTER XV.

THE PARSON IN TROUBLE.

FOR a few moments no one spoke. All were undecided as to what ought to be done.

The Jew peddler took it upon himself to break the silence.

"Py shimminy!" he exclaimed, "but dot vas von gweer gase, unt nobody hafe a lie tolt. Id vas somedings I could not understood."

"Got your trap open ergain, have yer?" cried Tony the Tough. "W'at did I tell yer before?"

"Yaw, dot vas so," the peddler admitted, "but I vorgot mineself dot times. I didn't heard nobody else say somedings, so I thought maybe I said somedings mineself to open der mill."

"Well, don't open your mill any more, that's all," he was warned.

"What ought to be done in such case, Colonel Jim?" inquired Harcroft, puzzled.

"I don't know what can be done," the colonel declared. "It is a hard nut to crack."

"Then you don't believe my story?" asked the young woman.

"We're willing enough to believe it," Colonel Jim answered, "but we don't see our way clear to arrest the parson."

"But can't I have him arrested somehow?" the young woman insisted. "Can't I take out a warrant against him, and proceed in that way? I tell you something has happened to my brother, and this man must know what."

Again the parson smiled, smiled pityingly.

"The fact is, lady," explained Colonel Jim, "we haven't any law machinery here at Paradise Pocket. The nearest justice is a dozen miles away."

"An' Judge Lynch ar' ther only sort o' law we knows much about, anyhow," added Hard-head Hugh.

"Will you allow me to offer a suggestion?" spoke up the Rev. Wallyngton.

"Shall be only too glad to have you do so," responded Sidney Harcroft.

"Well, it is this: You can never decide whose story to believe, so proof is the only thing that will count. Now I am willing to remain here, if my sister—"

"Don't call me your sister!" cried the young woman. "I do not know you, and will not allow you to call me so."

Motioning her to be still, the man went on.

"If she is willing to remain here, I am, and she may send for any one she may desire, to prove her statement. I am not afraid to trust the decision. All I ask is that you will help me in seeing that no harm comes to her."

No speech could have worked more in his favor, and most of the crowd at once gave him their support.

"I agree to that," was the young woman's response. "All I ask, citizens, is that you will keep an eye upon him and see that he does not break his word and run off before the proof comes."

And there were those who readily promised this too. It was a divided question, though the odds was in favor of the parson.

The veiled woman had had much to do with giving weight to the story that the young woman was insane.

Barney O'Linn now took it upon himself to speak up.

"Dhere is wan thing dhat Oi would loike to be askin'," he remarked.

"And what is that, my friend?" inquired Colonel Jim.

"Bedad, Oi would loike to be afther hearin' phwat kind fur a shitory dhe parson w'd be tellin' us," Barney explained.

"That's about so," cried Hard-head Hugh, immediately. "We have had the gal's yarn, but not his'n. Speak up, Mr. Sky Pilot, an' let's hear yer leetle tale."

"It is perfectly right that you should do so," supported the mine president. "Let us hear

your side of the case, as fully as the young lady has stated hers, and we can understand the situation better."

"Dot vas id, py chin!" from the peddler.

"You yust shoooot oop unt—"

"You shut up!" ordered Tony Gallagher, "and don't chip in again."

The peddler said no more then.

"I am perfectly willing to oblige you, gentlemen," the stranger declared. "I will tell you everything I can. But I suppose she will interrupt me—"

"I will not interrupt you," the young woman quickly promised.

There was nothing insane about her just now, that was plain, unless it was upon the one point in question.

"Thank you, Ruby," the man acknowledged, bowing to her. "The lady is my sister, gentlemen, and we are from Pennsylvania, as she has said. But that is the only point, about, upon which she is right. She has been insane for some time, by spells, and has cost us untold trouble. Her marriage troubles have no doubt—"

He checked himself suddenly, but the slip had been made.

"Begorra," Barney O'Linn quickly took him up, "but ye don't talk as straight as a praycher should. It was only a moment ago dhat yez said she had never been married in her loife, so ye did."

"Dot vas so, py chin id vas!" cried the peddler. "Unt you ton't vas got me to shut oop so gwick, like some oder dimes, landlort. I hafe right to open mine head, unt I vill. But dot vas all v'at I say dis dimes."

"Lucky fur you it is," cried Tony, threateningly.

"You see how he has caught himself!" the young woman had already exclaimed. "Now are you not ready to believe me?"

The man had stopped short, as said, and for a single instant his face showed the mistake he had made.

But now he had recovered, and was cool and calm, ready to fight it out, and it was hard to decide whether he was an impostor, as charged, or not.

"Is that not easily understood?" he demanded. "I would have spared my sister the pain of referring to the unfortunate affair, but now she has made it all known herself, and I must admit the truth—"

He was interrupted at that point, and in a surprising way.

The blue-velvet sport had taken a hand in the proceedings, and had stepped forward facing him with drawn revolver.

This caused great excitement, and the preacher fell back, holding up his hands as though in greatest genuine fear, and it certainly looked genuine.

"Don't point that thing at me! Don't!" he shouted.

"But, that is what I prefer to do," the sport answered, still holding him covered. "I believe you are a fraud."

"Thank Heaven there is one who will stand by me!" cried the young woman, and she moved nearer to the sport in blue. "I tell you he is a fraud, sir; I swear to you he is."

"I believe it, fully," the sport declared. "I have been observing him, and it is my opinion that he is no preacher. Besides, he has just put his foot into it, and tangled himself up with his own tongue."

"But, you did not hear me out," the man reminded.

"It's not necessary," the sport retorted. "You said you would have spared your sister the pain of referring to the affair, when in fact she had made it all known before you uttered your lie at all."

The man's face flushed painfully, but it was more with rage than with shame or confusion.

"Yaw, yaw," cried the peddler, "dot vas so, unt I dakes sides mit der shibort in der matter. You vas von schuide, unt you vould look pooty hangin' py a tree mit your neck a rope arouhdt, maybe."

The events were crowding too fast and exciting now for the proprietor of the place to offer further objections to the Jew's "chipping in."

Barney O'Linn had moved around to the end of the bar, where he had left his unwieldy gun and now had it in hand.

"Dhat's phwat's dhe matter!" he cried.

"Begorra, Oi had some suspicion dhat ye was not phwat ye claimed to be, me laddy, but Oi had nothin' dhen to back me up. Now ye have been caught in a lie, and praychers ain't supposed to lie, begob!"

"But what are you going to do about it?"

"Wasn't my offer all right?"

"The offer was all right," assured the sport, "and I'm only going to see to it that you carry out your part of it. Citizens of the Pocket," to the crowd, "don't you think there is enough against this fellow in appearance, to give you the excuse for making him a prisoner till this young lady has a chance to prove her case?"

"It begins to look that way, decidedly," agreed the mine president.

"And that's w'at we'll do," declared Colonel Jim, the president's opinion being enough to decide him. "Take him, boys, and disarm him, if he is armed."

Quick as a wink, then, the parson's hands flew under his coat, but, quicker still were those of the Jew peddler. He sprang forward, clearing a dozen feet in the leap, seemingly, and poked a pair of revolvers under the fellow's nose.

"Py chin!" he cried, "you traw dose boppers, mister, unt town goes your shanty so gwick you vas tink id vas hit py lightning, maypel. You vas a schuide, unt ve has got der pulge on you in der vorst kindt of vay."

"And av yez don't be houldin' av yer breath," added Barney O'Linn, "sure it is makin' mince-m'ate av ye Oi'll be doin', so Oi will!"

CHAPTER XVI.

CROWDING EVENTS, THIS.

NEED it be said excitement prevailed?

But, greater was soon to follow—greater than could be imagined.

The face of the Rev. Wallyngton had assumed another change. He had become as pale as death.

And this had taken place at the instant when the Jew peddler had sprung upon him so unexpectedly, balking his design of drawing his weapons.

To those around it seemed but natural, under the circumstances, for with the weapons of the blue-velvet sport and the peddler aimed at him, backed up by Barney O'Linn's formidable armament, he was in a bad fix.

But there was something deeper than these things, and something which had for the moment caused the parson's heart to quake with fear. His eyes and those of the Jew had met, and a light of recognition had appeared in both, with the result shown respecting the parson.

"My goodness, gentlemen!" the parson cried, "do you mean to kill me right on the spot?"

"Dot vas id, you bet!" assured the Jew. "If you so mooch as viggel von vinger, town you goes! Dot's vat Hannah vas der matter of."

"Begorra, ye may bet yer s'wate loife on dhat!" added Barney. "Up wid dhe two hands av ye, or it is spattherin' av yer carcass all over dhe place Oi'll be doin', sooner dhan quick."

"Men of Paradise," the parson appealed, "I demand protection. You have seen enough of me to know the kind of man I am. Should a mere slip of the tongue put my life in such jeopardy as this? I have signified my willingness to remain here, as a prisoner if you desire, but I want protection."

"Seems ter me ther Jew is too mighty previous with his poppers," spoke up the proprietor of the saloon. "Put 'em up, Al'rahim, an' give ther man a show."

The parson was holding up his hands, now, having obeyed Barney's order to that effect.

"Not py von plame sigbdt!" the peddler cried. "He vas say you hafe seen so mooch mit him dot you vas know der kindt of mans he vas. Dot vas von peeg misdakes, shentlemens. You vas not seen der half mit dot veller yet, py shimminy! Maybe you like me tolt you who dot maus vas, ein'd it? Dot vas der creat oudlaw veller, him v'at you vas call der Tuyfel Teu-vall!"

"What!" was the loud cry.

"Devil Duval! You don't mean it!"

Weapons were in every hand, and the "parson" was covered from every side.

He was now even more pale than he had been at all, and a perspiration was seen starting upon his face.

"What nonsense is this?" he gasped.

"Py chin, it vas no nonsense!" cried the peddler. "Yust somepody shideb oop unt pull dem viskers mit his chaws off."

"If that is the proof," spoke up the proprietor of the saloon, "then a lot of it is that. If ye are an honest Jew, ye'll have to treat the parson that's all."

"Treat nothin'!" cried Tony the Tough. "If he's makin' a false charge 'gainst ther gent he deserves ter be hangd, fer it's no small 'fense ter make a charge like that."

But, there was no mistake, for even while he

was speaking, the sport had stepped forward and given a pull at the whiskers and they came off in his hand.

"Vat I peeu oldt you, hey?" cried the Jew. "Great gophers!" exclaimed Hikey Hen, "but that's who it ar', sure!"

"Be yer sure, Hikey?" demanded Hard-head Hugh.

"Course I be. Didn't I see ther cuss at Burnt Match?"

"Then by tanel he's got ter swing! Come on, boys, an' we'll—"

"Yust holt hardt mit your deam hosses leadle vile, shentlemans!" interrupted the peddler. "Dis veller vas mine mutton, py right of discovery, maype."

"To ther dease with that!" cried a voice in the crowd. "Bring him out and string him up, without any foolin' about it."

"And how 'bout that reward?" added somebody else. "Be we goin' ter 'low a Jew peddler to come in hyar an' walk off with that, boyees? Reckon we'll claim it ourselves, hey?"

"You bet! You bet!" from others. "He couldn't never took him 'thout our aid, an' ther boodle 'longs ter us!"

"Geep gool, shentlemans, geep gool," spoke the peddler, waving one of his revolvers toward the crowd threateningly. "I ton'd vant dhe monish, not von pit of id. All I vants is der mans, unt him I means to have, py shimminy!"

The excitement that now prevailed defies description.

The outlaw, for there was no mistake, was helpless, for every weapon was aimed at him.

"What have you got to say for yourself?" demanded the blue-velvet sport.

"Only this—that there is a great mistake," was the response. "I am forced to admit that I am not what I seemed, but that I am Devil Duval—it is simply impossible. I defy you to prove it."

"Great gophers!" cried Hikey Hen again, "it are proved already. Don't I say yer is that cuss? An' wasn't I at Burnt Match ter see ye?"

"You are only one," was the retort, "and my word is as good as any other man's, I guess."

"Yaw, yaw," put in the peddler; "but I said you vas der oudlaw, too, unt dot vas two 'g'inst von, maype."

"But, prove it," was the challenge. "You can't hang me without proof, men of Paradise Pocket."

"That is certainly so, boys," spoke up Sidney Harcroft. "Go slow, and make no mistake."

"Yes, go slow," added Colonel Jim. "We must be sure about this thing, you know."

"Dot vas right," acquiesced the Jew peddler. "You vants der broof, unt now I broceed to gife id mit you. You say you vas seen dot mans at Purnt Match, hey?" to Hikey Hen.

"Bet yer life I did," was the assurance.

"Unt you say he vas der oudlaw, ain'd it?"

"You bet he ar'!"

"Ver' goot. Now, if you seen him, maype you must seen der shbort he had der drouble mit, yust der same."

"You mean Dick Darrel, ther feller what he killed an' brought his head hyar to ther disgrace of ther camp?"

"Yaw, yaw. Now would you know d'ot mans if you seen him, maype?"

"Know him! Why, of course! Didn't I know ther head at sight? Poor cuss! he are done fur. What is yer gettin' at, anyhow?"

"Dot vas yust id. See who you t'inks I vas mit mine self."

With that, and a quick motion, the peddler tore a false beard from his face.

Every person in the room uttered a cry of amazement, for there stood revealed the double of the severed head.

"Dick Darrel, by gophers!" cried Hikey Hen, immediately.

"Thank you, sir. Yes, citizens, I am Dick Darrel, and this fellow is no other than Craig Morgan, alias Devil Duval the outlaw."

The blue-velvet sport and Barney O'Linn had taken the prisoner in hand, and there was no chance for him to offer resistance, or to attempt to escape.

Great was the excitement, and the many remarks exchanged simply set quotation at defiance.

"But if this hyar is Dick Darrel," cried Hard-head Hugh, "who was ther feller whose head we diskivered on the Plaza?"

"Haven't I told you that?" reminded the young woman who had first exposed the pretending parson. "It was the head of the man who was my husband."

"Then this hyar cuss sartainly must know

somethin' erbout your brother, if he ar' wearin' his duds an' sportin' his name."

"Which is what I have claimed," the young woman urged. "Will you not force him to tell what he knows of my brother's fate, gentlemen?"

"I will make it my business to find out about that, lady," declared Dandy Dick, who had now cast off his disguise completely. "Your brother's fate shall be made known."

A sneering smile curled the lips of the steel-nerved outlaw, as though he was resolving that he would have something to say about that himself.

At this moment a sudden commotion was heard near the door, and a man broke through the crowd, exclaiming:

"Al Wistner, hy ther gods o' war!"

He made straight for Dandy Dick, but, suddenly stopped, doubting.

A rough looking fellow he was, with one arm in a sling, and looking as though he had recently been sick.

"Do you mean to say I am that person, sir?" asked Dick.

"Durn it, I thought so at first sight," answered the man, "but I orter knowed better, secin' as I witnessed poor Al's head cut off clean. But, who ther dickins be you? You looks enough like my pard to be a twin to him."

CHAPTER XVII.

SOME DISCLOSURES MADE.

DANDY DICK now took the leading hand. Freed from his disguise, he appeared for what he was.

Casting off the clothes he had had on, over his own, he was a new person.

Clad in a natty dark suit, he was the same good-looking and graceful man we have seen before.

His disguise had been almost perfection, for no one had suspected for a moment that he was anything other than he seemed.

But further explanations later. Now had appeared a new actor upon the scene, and one who quite evidently had a story to tell, judging by the words dropped.

"No, I am not your dead pard, that is certain," Dandy Dick assured. "My name is Dick Darrel, since you have asked. Now let me put a question or two to you, if you don't mind."

"Fire ahead," was the invitation. "I see you has got ther cuss what done it fer poor Al, an' that's all I keer about. I want ter square 'counts with him, or anyhow see it done, fer I ain't in trim ter do it myself now."

"That answers one question I meant to put to you," said Dick. "I was going to ask if you recognized this man as the one who killed your pard."

"Yas, he's ther feller what done it, sure. An' now I kin see how it was he mistook my pard fer you."

"Ha! that was it, eh? It was as I thought it must have been. But, tell us all about it."

Meanwhile two persons had left the room, unnoticed.

One of these was the mysterious veiled woman, and the other a man.

The latter had taken a horse, and was now riding leisurely out of the valley to the west.

"It are soon told," said the man, in response to Dick's request. "I'll give ye the whole story, so's ye can grip yer understandin' onto it ther better. Yer see, me and Al Wistner was pards. We had knowed each other fer some time. That was ther name I knowed him by, an' I s'pose it was his kerreck handle, though he might of had another fer all I know. Anyhow, there was somethin' he kept shady from me, but I never worried over that."

"But come to ther p'int," urged Hard-head Hugh.

"All right; merely stated them facts 'as a beginnin'. As I say, Al had somethin' he didn't never let me inter. There was some reason why he was out hyar in the wilds, an' laterly he has been keepin' rather shady. The other afternoon, as we was walkin' along a trail some miles from hyar, we 'spied somethin' by ther side of ther way, in ther bushes a bit, that looked like a hat. We went in, an' durn me if thar wasn't a hull dandy outfit of ther finest sort: hat, boots, an' everything else. An' what does Al do but put 'em on."

"Well, that mought 'a' been all right if it hadn't been all wrong, but it appears now that them 'ar duds cost ther poor devil his life. After he had made ther exchange we went on our way, Al lookin' like ary Jim dandy, you bet, with his high hat an' patent-leather boots. An' everything went all right till it was jest about dusk, when all of a sudden this hyar cuss 'peared afore us, with his barkers in hand, an' he says,

says he: "Dick Darrel, we'll settle that score now."

"I see it all," Dandy Dick broke in. "He mistook your pard for me. But, go on, and let's hear the rest."

"Well," the fellow continued, "I won't try fer repeat all that was said, but my pard he tried to deny that he was Dick Darrel, but that wouldn't do. This feller was sure of his man, as he looked at it, an' nothin' would do but Al must fight him. It was either fight or be shot right down, so Al agreed ter fight. I tried ter cbip in a shot on ther sly, but blame me if ther feller didn't plug me afore I could do it, pluggin' this hyar arm an' sendin' ther ball right inter my spareribs. Down I went an' my poppers fell out o' reach, an' thar I was."

"I was dazed like, but could notice what was goin' on, after a fashion, an' I seen him an' Al go at it with their knives, an' purty quick Al got the worst of it an' down he went. An' then, ther wu'st of it all, dast me if ther hyena didn't bend down an' cut off his head, slick an' clean! An' when he had done that, he held it up, lookin' at it with a wicked smug that made him look like the devil himself, and he said, says he: "Dick Darrel, this settles your case. It was no use your kicking against Devil Duval. I'll make use of your head, now, as a warnin' to others. I'll take it to ther nearest camp," says he, "an' make a 'zample of it for the benefit of others who may hanker after my scalp." An' about that time I must 'a' fainted, fer I don't remember no more till I kin to, next mornin'. Then ther head war gone, an' the body too."

While he was talking, Barney O'Linn had securely bound the prisoner, no one offering to interfere, and he was disarmed of every weapon.

"The truth of this man's story," spoke Dick Darrel, when the fellow had ended his narration, "is not to be doubted. I will make some statements which will serve to make everything clear to you, men of Paradise Pocket. And when I have done I will leave it for you to say whether this human monster should answer to me for the wrong he has done me, or whether your claim upon his life is the stronger. But, remember, by my hand he dies, even if I have to shoot him here in his tracks."

Dick's voice was ringing, and his words so stern, that every one drew back a little from him and his foe.

In calm and even tones, then, Dick went ahead, telling his story in full, as it was made known to the reader in Popular Library No. 1. Want of space will not allow its reproduction here. The necessities of the case, however, compel us to quote from a certain point.

"So ended the first struggle," Dick proceeded, after a pause. "This rascal and his lieutenant, aided in their escape by the woman, disappeared, and our revenge was for the time balked. But, we then and there took oath that we would hunt them to the earth's ends, if necessary, and bring them to the fate they so richly deserve. The woman, I may remark, disappeared, and we have not seen her since, unless"—and at that point Dick looked around the room, as if in search of some one.

"A little time passed," Dick went on, "and finally we heard that Devil Duval and a new band had been seen here at this camp of Paradise Pocket, so we prepared to pay you a visit, with the hope of meeting them and working out our vengeance. This," indicating the blue-velvet sport, "is my poor wife's sister; and this, as I need not tell you now, is Barney O'Linn, my faithful helper and partner, as I may call him. We came to within a little distance of your town, camped over night, and next day came on separately, pretending not to know one another, as you have seen."

"I had previously laid off my other disguise, leaving it at the place where this man has told us his unfortunate companion found it, and his story is not to be doubted in any particular. This outlaw certainly must have believed he had laid me low, but he was mistaken. And now I leave it for you to decide. Am I not justly entitled to the revenge I demand? I do not want you to hang him, citizens, but I do want to meet him face to face, in fair fight, and have no fear concerning the outcome. I wait for you to decide."

The crowd in the saloon broke into one acclaim in Darrel's favor.

"You shall have what you ask," declared Colonel Jim. "The infamous villain is bound to give you the satisfaction you demand. I only wish he had ten lives, that we could give him ten deaths for his deviltry and crimes!"

"I am willing to fight this man upon condition that I be allowed to leave the camp if I am the victor," the rascal had the nerve to propose.

"Leave the camp—alive? Never!" cried Colonel Jim. "Your life shall pay the forfeit for your crimes in any event. Even if you kill this brave young man, you do not escape your fate, for I will fight you, you detestable cut-throat!"

"And I!" "And I!" "And I!" shouted several others.

"You need have no fear," said Dick to the men around. "I will have his life as surely as he lives this moment. Think of my wrongs! Do you imagine for a moment that I would fail in my revenge?"

"You might fail, nevertheless," reminded Colonel Jim. "But if you do, be assured that he shall not escape the fate he deserves. I myself will end his vile career, if you fail."

"Well," cried Dick, with grim determination, "I am ready. This is as good a time as any, and—"

"Are you forgetting my brother?" the young woman at that moment cried out. "If you kill this man before you make him tell what he knows, I may never hear of my poor brother again."

A frown came upon Dandy Dick's face, and he put away the knife he had already taken in hand.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "In my excitement I forgot my promise to you. Dick Darrel does not break his word. I will put off my revenge till we have made every effort in your behalf."

"Thank you," the woman returned, feelingly.

"Will you tell what you know about this matter, Craig Morgan?" Dick demanded.

The outlaw smiled his diabolical smile, and a light of triumph shone in his eyes.

"I might be induced to tell," he drawled in answer. "I will say that the man is alive, but he is a close prisoner, and I alone know where he is. Kill me, and he is fated to die of the tortures of slow starvation. No human being can prevent that!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

ESCAPE OF A PRISONER.

DANDY DICK bit his lip with vexation. Here must be a delay, if nothing worse, and he fretted at the thought.

The hour of revenge was his, and nothing ought to come between him and the man who had so deeply wronged him.

But, here was his promise to this young woman—a promise which he was bound to respect, for the fate of her brother hung perhaps in the balance.

There was no knowing whether the detestable wretch was speaking the truth or a clever lie. It was possible that the woman's brother was already dead: and, indeed, Dick thought it quite probable.

The doubt was there, none the less, and nothing could be done except to try to force the truth out of the prisoner, keeping him secure against escape in the mean time. It was a situation Dick detested. Nor did his companions relish it.

"What, then, is to be done with ther wolf?" asked Hard-head Hugh.

"That's what's ther matter," cried Hickey Hen. "He's likely ter escape yer, same as he did afore, ef ye don't nip him ter once."

"He shall not have any chance to escape," assured Darrel, "for he shall not go out of my sight a moment. But I am puzzled to know how to force him to talk."

That smile gave a still more scornful turn to the outlaw's sinister lips.

"Perhaps I can suggest something," spoke Colonel Jim Hoxley.

"What is it?" Dick asked.

"Let's make believe he is merely our prisoner, and so try to force terms with his band."

"Just what was running in my own mind," Dick admitted. "It may work, for the fellow undoubtedly has one or more of his men near at hand."

"Allow me a word," the prisoner spoke up. "I have men near me. The man who made the attempt to kill me, would die in his tracks instantly. If you don't believe it, try it on. If you want to make terms, make them with me."

"What would you agree to, in the way of terms?" asked Dick.

"I will tell you. You let me write and seal what I know about this young woman's brother, telling you where to find him. Then give me one hour in which to make my escape if I can. At the end of that time you may follow me, and the fight will be begun anew."

"Never!" cried Dick. "You shall not go out of my sight!"

"All right, then; that settles the fate of the Rev. Ray Wallyngton."

At this the young woman began to weep, silently, and Dandy Dick was puzzled what to do.

"There is but one way open, that I can see," spoke up the blue-velvet sport—as we may still call the woman who was Dick's sworn coadjutor.

"And what is that?" Dick asked.

"To lock the man up, let the whole camp guard him, and sooner or later something will come from his followers."

"A good idea," sneered the prisoner; "but, in the mean time, the parson will be starving to death, and may be a goner before you gain your ends."

"Begorra, but I've me put in a wurred roight here," cried the young Irishman. "Shtand dhe spalpeen up furninst dhe wall ever dhere, I've me have soight on him wid me musketoon, an' by dhe powers av he don't shpake in wan minute it is makin' a coroner's subject av him Oi'll be doin'!"

This was greeted with approval and much laughter, but it did not fill the requirements of the case.

"It won't do, Barney," Dandy Dick objected.

"We will try another plan."

Turning to Colonel Jim Hoxley, he asked:

"Is there a place where he can be securely imprisoned?"

"We have some strong cabins here," was the answer. "No doubt any of the boys will lend his cabin for the purpose."

Several voices were immediately heard, offering the service of a cabin for the safe keeping of the prisoner.

"An' mine are jest ther one yer wants!" cried Hickey Hen. "It kin be sealed up as tight as ary jug, an' it would be jest ez hard ter break in ez it would ter break out. Everybody knows that; hey, fellers?"

"That's so," agreed Hard-head. "Hike's coop are a good one, an' he'll never git out o' thar."

"Then that point is definitely settled," spoke Darrel. "Now let us select a guard. We want at least a dozen men, and men who are to be trusted."

A woman had been listening in the hall, where the door was ajar, the same one who had gone out shortly before. Her hands were clasped, and her whole manner was indicative of the greatest anxiety and excitement. At this point she silently withdrew and hastened away.

Colonel Jim Hoxley quickly named the men, and they stepped to the front willingly as their names were called.

"You are to guard this prisoner with your lives," Colonel Jim told them. "If he gets away I will hold you to account for his escape, remember that. The hell-bound is never to leave this camp alive. If Darrel doesn't finish him I will, that I swear. He is too vile to live."

"Never fear that he will escape his fate at my hands, once we meet," reassured Dick. "I will take his life or give up my own, one or the other. It must be death for one of us, for nothing but death can ever settle the score between us, after the wrongs he has done me. But, come, now that the place has been fixed upon and the guard picked, let's put the prisoner there, and then I will unfold a plan to you."

A shout of approval greeted the proposal, as considerable time had already been consumed in planning.

This decided upon, the prisoner was led out and away, nearly the whole crowd following, and was left in a cabin, securely bound, with a dozen men or more to guard against even the chance of his escape.

Dick left Barney as chief of the guard, and returned with the crowd to the saloon, where he intended to unfold his plan to a few citizens privately—Colonel Jim Hoxley, Hard-head Hugh, and others. But, when they entered the place there was new excitement.

On a chair was seated a young man, pale, haggard, and only half-clad.

Before him, her hands clasping his, knelt the young woman who had arrived by the stage.

The man was used up, almost completely. He was bleeding in a dozen places, the few garments he had on were torn, and it was plain that he had been having a rather rough experience.

"Who is this?" Darrel demanded, hurrying forward.

"Oh, sir, it is my poor brother!" the young woman answered. "He has made his escape, but almost at cost of his life."

"Where has he been? Can you talk, sir? Can you give replies to a few questions?"

The man made the attempt, but was almost too weak to make his words distinct enough to be understood.

"He has just come in, sir," explained the young woman. "He is nearly dead with exhaustion, as you can see. He has managed to tell of his escape from outlaws, with barely his life. Oh! I fear he will die!"

Dick had made a motion to the barkeeper, and that worthy hurried with a dose he had been preparing.

Handing the glass to Dick, the contents was hurriedly passed to the wounded man's lips, and some of the stuff was taken.

It was a case where liquors would do some good, and its effect was speedily noticed.

An eager crowd had gathered around, everybody anxious to hear what the man would have to say when he could tell his story—for that he had a story to tell, was plain.

"This will give yer ther chance ter go for yer enemy, after all," spoke up Hickey Hen.

"Yes, and I am thankful, too," answered Dick. "It was gall and wormwood to let him have any respite from my vengeance."

"But yer had better let us hang him, and not run any risks," advised Hard-head Hugh. "Thar's a possible chance that yer may git ther wust of it, ye know."

"I am willing to assume the risk," answered Dick. "I want the satisfaction of fighting him,—of taking his life with my own hand. And do you wonder, you who have heard my story?"

"No one can wonder at it, sir," declared the mine president. "He deserves the worst fate you can bring him to suffer."

"The only thing to excite wonder," added Colonel Jim, "is that you could resist killing him when you had him here face to face."

By this time the wounded man showed signs of recovered strength, and spoke.

"He is a devil incarnate!" he gasped.

"And you do not know half what a devil he is, sir," Dandy Dick averred. "My story would chill your blood, to say nothing of his daring audacity in preaching a funeral sermon over one of the murdered victims."

At mention of such a thing, the young preacher's face turned even more deadly pale than it had been.

"Did he do that?" he asked. "Did he play such a part, pretending he was myself?"

"Yes; and that is among the least of his misdeeds," assured Colonel Jim.

"But, your story," urged Dick.

The young man now had hold of his sister's hands, and his strength gaining he said:

"I suppose my sister has told you something of our business here?"

"I have told them everything, Ray," was the response. "They know all about us. And our search is over, for Allen Wistner is dead."

"Dead!"

That matter was explained in full, and when it had been told, then the young man proceeded with what he had to disclose.

He need not be quoted at length. Coming along the canyon trail, on the previous day, he had come suddenly face to face with the outlaw and his Dozen. The chief had put some questions to him, and when he had answered them, ordered his capture, saying he wanted to borrow his outfit and name for a little while. He had been taken to a cavern where the outlaws had their rendezvous, there made to exchange his clothes for the rags he now had on, and had been a prisoner since. On this afternoon, seeing a chance for escape, he had taken it; but had been discovered, fired after, and had suffered a fall over a ledge into a ravine, where he had no doubt been left for dead. He escaped without broken bones, however, and finally crawled to the camp.

CHAPTER XIX.

FOREWARNED FOREARMED.

SUCH in brief, the young clergyman's story; and when he had done, Dick Darrel ordered him taken to a room and cared for.

He was badly but not fatally wounded, and there was every chance that he would come out all right.

His coming freed Dick Darrel's hands, and now nothing remained but for him to meet his foe in deadly combat, as was his strongest desire.

By this time the day was far spent, and night was coming on.

Supper was ready at the saloon, but Dick did not respond to the call. His nerves were too tightly strung to allow any relaxation yet.

He was the center of interest, and the crowd watched his every move, wanting to be sure not to miss the fight which all knew must soon take place. He had the sympathy of every man in the camp.

"When is yer goin' ter tackle ther cuss?" Hard-head Hugh finally put.

"As night is at hand," answered Dick, "I'll wait till dark. It can be done by torchlight on the Plaza. I will put it off one hour."

This was greeted with a shout, and many hurried away to improve the time allowed.

Dick Darrel paced to and fro in the saloon the entire time. The blue-velvet sport was with him, though he said but little to her.

Long before the hour had expired the crowd was back again, and the saloon was filled, while outside on the Plaza all was bustle and excitement. Torches were being provided, and a lighted circle was formed in which the battle was to be fought.

About the time the hour was up, a man came running breathlessly into the Round-up.

"Call out yer melishy, pards!" he cried. "Buckle on yer guns, an' git ready fur biz! Ther Devil's Dozen ar' a-comin', hot foot!"

Nothing could have occasioned a greater stir. A hundred questions were fired at the man at once, in eager haste.

"Yas, it's ther fact!" the fellow assured. "I've got it right from headquarters! They is comin' hyar, on ther run, ter try an' rescue ther chief! No time ter fool about it!"

Colonel Jim Hoxley took the matter in hand immediately, ordering every man to be prepared, and every one who had a horse to be mounted.

And the orders given, it was then looked to the messenger for an explanation in full of what he had learned, and his story was listened to eagerly by every one in the room.

"Yer see, pards," he narrated, "I was comin' over this hyar way through ther Goose-neck Canyon, not a great while ago, an' I comed suddenly upon a feller asleep on ther ground at ther Fork. He was armed like ary man-o'-war, an' I was hesitatin' what ter do erbout it, when another feller suddenly pops inter sight on ther run. This feller was him we knows as Bummer Boze, ther galoot what drifted inter this camp a couple o' weeks ago. An' he's one of ther Dozen, too."

"Ther doose he are!"

"Sure enough, fer a fack! Well, he runs up, gives ther sleeper a kick, an' he jumps up with poppers ready fer biz. Seein' who it was, though, he cooled down, an' then Bummer Boze let out his news. He told t'other feller that Devil Duval had been made a prisoner at ther Pocket by Dandy Dick, an' that a rescue must be made at once, or it would be a heap too late. An' then they planned ter come hyar a little after dark, come inter ther camp with a whoop an' a yell, kill everybody who got in their way, an' make a big fight of it, thinkin' ter rescue ther prisoner while ther scrimmage are goin' on. An' then they parted, Bummer Boze comin' back hyar an' t'other feller hurryin' off ter git ther men. An' Bummer Boze are goin' ter be on hand ter try ter let ther boss devil out when the fun begins. That's ther hull of it."

"That man must be arrested immediately!" cried Dandy Dick. "Go for him, some of you who know him, and make sure of him. And double the guard at the cabin."

Men hastened off to obey these directions, while Dick and Colonel Jim set about heading the forces who were to meet the outlaws.

Hard-head Hugh, Hikey Hen and others were they who had set off to arrest Bummer Boze, and he was soon discovered. He was acting as guardsman at the cabin.

"Look hyar, you infarnal p'izen whelp!" Hard-head cried, as his revolver and half a dozen more covered the fellow's head.

"Wh— wh— what's ther matter?" the traitor gasped, pale as death.

"You is wanted, that's what's ther matter," was the answer; and forthwith he was seized and securely bound.

It was much to his surprise and more against his earnest protest, but protest was useless, and without much ceremony he was hastened away to a place of safe-keeping till wanted.

A little later and the forces were ready for the reception of the outlaws as soon as they chose to make their appearance.

Everything had been prepared for a hot fight. Two forces were in waiting, one mounted and the other on foot, and every man was fully armed.

Once let the outlaw band get between them, and it was not likely that a man would remain alive to tell the tale.

Further up the valley outposts had been stationed, to announce the approach of the band by secret signal, and the mounted force, divided in two companies, waited for that sign.

Finally the signal was heard, and every man was on the alert. It was repeated, and horsemen were seen coming.

Nearer they came, stopped for a moment, and then with loud, wild yells, made a bold dash into the camp.

Yelling and shooting, enough to have struck terror to the camp had it been a surprise, on they spurred, wanting to draw every attention to themselves.

They were allowed to proceed until they were in just the right position, and then of a sudden a storm of fire and leaden hail burst upon them from two directions, with death-dealing, destructive effect.

Down they went, horse and rider, almost the entire band. The two or three who remained appearing to be struck dumb by the unexpected calamity. Immediately another broadside burst upon them.

Two more went down, but the third and last had turned to escape just before the fire burst forth, and was not hit. With a yell of fright, as it must have been, he dug his spurs into his horse and was off like the wind.

But faster flew the bullets after him, though for a few moments not one seemed to hit the mark; but, presently, the horse was seen to stumble and fall, throwing the rider far over its head.

With cheers of victory the citizens of the Pocket dashed forward to learn the results, and going to the main body of the fallen first, they found not a man alive.

Where the last man had dropped, however, only the horse remained. The rider had made his escape, and perhaps unhurt.

It was a victory, but it was not complete so long as one had got away. One out of a dozen, though, could well be spared, it was reasoned.

Dandy Dick, torch in hand, was going from body to body, as though in search of some particular one, and when he had done he was heard to say to himself, in a tone of anger:

"It is as I feared. It was the lieutenant that got away, and Barney's time for revenge is not yet. But we will have you, Owen Maron, or 'Devil's Right Bower,' as you are called. You shall meet your doom before we give up."

The town was whooping itself hoarse, and was wild over its signal victory.

But it was not forgotten that the chief rascal of all was yet to be dealt with, and when the uproar had a little subsided the crowd began to drift in the direction of the cabin prison.

Presently Dandy Dick and the blue-velvet sport appeared there, and a cheer was given. Now was the time when the long-deferred vengeance was to be had, the desire for righteous vengeance satisfied, or— But there was no doubt in Dandy Dick's mind.

"Did ye kill dhat murtherin' gossoon?" asked Barney, as soon as Dick came up.

"No, Barney," was the answer, Dick knowing whom he meant; "he got away—the only one."

"Dhe curse af Heaven upon him!" Barney cried. "But Oi don't give him up, for Oi'll folly him to dbe ind av me days but phwat Oi'll give him phwat he deserves."

To this Dick echoed a vow of support, and turning to the crowd, addressed the citizens of the Pocket in these words:

"Now, men of Paradise Pocket, victory has been yours, and vengeance must be mine. I will fight this outlaw fiend to the death, with knives—the only way I desire to meet him. Let everything be arranged as you first intended, and then bring him to the Plaza to face me."

A loud cry of approval greeted this, and when Dick had cautioned Barney again not to permit the man to escape, he and the sport in velvet started toward the Plaza.

Only half the distance had they proceeded, when a great cry arose behind them.

CHAPTER XX.

THE VAILED WOMAN'S STRATEGY.

MEANWHILE something else of vital importance had taken place.

It will be remembered that mention was made of the vailed woman's leaving the saloon soon after the exposure and arrest of the outlaw.

Lingering in the hall, with the door ajar, as told, she heard all that followed, and no sooner had she learned the place in which the prisoner was to be locked up, than she went there in mad haste.

No one noticed her, and she was safe in the cabin before the crowd set out from the saloon with the prisoner; and once there, fortune favored her. The owner had a big chest in one corner, and raising the lid of that and finding it empty, she got in and lay down.

She had taken the precaution to put something under the lid, to admit air, and there she was when the prisoner was brought in.

Her heart almost ceased beating then, so fearful was she that she would be discovered.

The seconds passed. No one opened the chest; and finally, when the prisoner had been made secure, his captors withdrew and the cabin was locked.

She now drew a breath of relief, but not a sound escaped her. To let her presence be known, even to the prisoner himself, might defeat the very end she had in view.

At last, when it was dark without as well as within, so that it would be impossible for any one to discover her presence without the aid of a light, she lifted the lid of the chest and crept forth.

She was so cramped, at first, from her long continuing in the one position in the close confines of the chest, that she dared not trust herself to move for fear of making some blunder that would arouse suspicion.

While she waited she listened attentively, to make sure that no one but the prisoner was inside the cabin. Being assured on that point, and finally having better command of her limbs, she advanced to the corner where the rascal was bound, laid a hand on him gently, at the same time whispering:

"Sh! Not a word—not a sound above a whisper!"

"Who are you?" was the whispered demand.

"She who loves you as she loves life itself," the answer. "I am here to save you if I can."

"But, who are you? How came you here without being discovered?"

"Do you not know me, Charlie?"

"Not Pearl Mayne!"

"Yes, Charlie Mason—if that be your name, I am Pearl Mayne; I am the one who loves you better than all else in the world—more than I love my life. I saved you once, at peril of my own life, and I am here to do it again—if possible."

It was too intensely dark for them to see each other, but the outlaw could feel the woman's warm breath fanning his face, as her arms embraced him.

Here was an exhibit of love and unselfish devotion such as he was incapable of understanding, much less appreciating. For the moment it seemed to paralyze his power of thought.

"Bless you, Pearl," he exclaimed in whisper, imprinting a kiss on the face so close to his own, "bless you! I love you for your bravery. If nothing more, Help me out of this and I'll make you my bride—I swear it!"

"That is all I ask," was the glad cry.

"But, you have not told me how you came here. In what manner of disguise are you? I cannot understand how you got in. Tell me everything."

"I will do so, but I must hasten. Time is precious, for your life is in the greatest possible danger. Perhaps I shall be unable to save you, but if so I will die with you."

"But, your story, Pearl. What became of you after you helped me to escape at Burnt Match?"

"It was owing to that man of yours, your Bower, that I did not go with you. That was my intention, but he hurled me from my horse and took the animal himself, and I was left there."

"Yes; I know, and he deserved to die for the dastardly trick; but it was a matter of life and death with him."

"Yes; and I did not blame him so much afterward, when I could think it over, for, as you say, it was his only hope—his only chance, and he took it."

"And what became of you then?"

"I escaped, as quickly as possible, for I did not know but the crowd would do me harm for the mischief I had worked to their plans. Then, after my escape was assured, I began anew my search for you."

"And you have found me in time to render me another service. Still you have not answered one of my questions. How are you disguised? How did you get in here? What is your—"

"Why will you waste time so? I will tell you in few words, and then you must follow my directions and take the only chance that offers. You may possibly escape."

"But, what is your plan? How is it to be done? Let me hear that first of all, and then your story afterward. As you say, time is precious, for they may come for me at any moment. Cut these cursed bonds, and do it quickly."

In a moment her keen knife had severed the bonds, and he was freed.

"Now, listen," she commanded, as he stood up: "We must exchange clothes, and you must

conceal yourself in that big chest, where I have been—"

"In the chest! Were you in that thing all the time? It will never work—it is impossible. You will be recognized, and they will know I have not got out of the cabin. No, it can't be—"

"But it is your only chance. We must exchange clothes, and when that is done you must bind me here where you have been. Then you must get into the chest, and when they come they will probable hurry me out quickly, before the cheat is discovered, and you must take advantage of the opportunity and make your escape in the darkness."

"Pearl, you are a jewel! I see it is the only chance I have, and I must not throw it away, for it is certain death for me to remain here. Let us hasten to carry out your plan."

It was speedily done.

There in the total darkness they exchanged garments, and when that had been done the outlaw bound the woman securely in the place where he had been.

"I hope the plan will not fail," he remarked. "Once let me get off with my life, and Dick Darrel shall pay for all this, and with interest. I will trap him, if it takes six months to do it."

"Had we not better go far away, you and I, if I am not hanged for this night's work?" the woman suggested. "Remember, you have promised to make me your bride."

In the darkness his diabolical smile wreathed the villain's face.

Little intention had he of fulfilling the promise it had been to his interest to make.

"Perhaps you are right," he said, in gentle tone. "If you escape, and escape you will, certainly, meet me at Denver as soon as possible, and together we will disappear forever from this part of the country."

"I will do it—gladly will I do it. I am the veiled woman who came here as Mrs. Chintley. I had heard of your raid here, and hoped to find you. I recognized you when you came to my room to see that young woman who claimed at first to be your sister, but I did not let you know me then. I tried all in my power to help you out of that trouble, as you can see now. Failing, I came here, as soon as I learned where you were to be imprisoned, hid in the chest, and here I am. But, into the chest yourself! You must not delay another instant!"

An ominous stillness reigned without, and they knew not at what moment the door of the cabin would be opened.

Barely had he let down the lid of the chest over him, when loud shouting and firing were heard in the valley without.

The outlaw lifted the lid again and listened. His men had come to his rescue! Filled with hope anew, he sprung from the chest, weapons in hand, awaiting.

But that hope faded away. The battle was short and decisive, and by the cries of victory that followed, Craig Morgan learned the fate that had overtaken his outlaw band. Nothing remained for him but this one last hope, and in a mood of commingled despair and desperate resolve he returned to his hiding-place—the big chest.

CHAPTER XXI.

AN ORDERLY HANGING.

WHEN Dandy Dick turned away, after his final word of caution to Barney O'Linn against allowing the prisoner a chance to escape, Barney turned to the cabin where the outlaw was confined.

"It is now for it, me lads," he said to those around him. "We'll take the baste av a skunk out an' march him to the place av his death—fur death it will be, an' he wanst faces me mas-ther Dick Darrel in fair foight. No power will save him an' wanst they meet."

"It will be death to him anyhow!" was the shout. "If Dandy Dick don't settle him, Colonel Jim will! Out with him! Bring ther hyena out hyar!"

The door was speedily opened and the crowd pressed in.

It was semi-dark there, the only light being from the torches without.

Barney and others pressed forward to the corner where the prisoner was bound, laying hold upon him with no gentle hands.

"Yez are wanted, ye spalpeen!" cried Barney. "Dhe toime is up for ye, an' now is dhe hour of your retribution for the dirty crimes ye have done."

"Bet yer life it are!" was the echo. "Out with ther cuss," jerking the prisoner up and toward the door, "an' death to the man who tries to interfere. No escape fer ye this hyar time."

But no sooner had the prisoner been taken through the door, than the lid of the chest was raised and the outlaw was out, armed and ready to fight for his life, if need be. A moment's pause, then out the door he sprung, turned, and in another moment was lost in the darkness behind the cabin.

Nor was he a second too soon, for barely had he turned the corner of the cabin when the crowd halted, and loud and angry exclamations were heard.

For the first few moments the light had been dim, but now those who had torches pressing close, the cheat was discovered, and greatest excitement prevailed immediately.

"T'under an' turf!" cried Barney, the first to discover the deception, "phwat thrick is this?"

"A woman, by ther gods!"

"An' ther p'izen critter hev gi'n us ther slip, after all!"

And then arose a shouting such as the valley had not heard that night, wild, vengeful cries of hottest rage.

When that cry arose, Dandy Dick and the blue-velvet sport stopped short and looked back.

"What can that mean, I wonder?" Dick questioned.

"I can not guess," the woman responded.

Louder and more excited grew the uproar, and knowing that something must be wrong, Dick started back, running, the sport following him.

At a little distance from the cabin they were met by the excited crowd, with the prisoner—rather a prisoner, and Barney O'Linn in the van acting like a crazy man.

"What is it, Barney?" Dick hurriedly demanded.

"Look an' see, sor," the young Irishman answered, flaring his torch around so that the light fell full upon the prisoner's face.

"My God!" Dick gasped. "Am I barked again?"

"Yis, begorra, barked again it is!" exclaimed Barney, in rage. "An' it is by this Jezebel, too!"

"Woman!" cried Dick, fiercely, "what have you done? Why have you come again between me and the object of a just vengeance?"

"You know well enough what I have done," was the response. "I have saved the life of the man I love. Do with me as you will. If my own life must pay the forfeit, I shall die happy."

"Fool—fool!" Dick cried in passion. "Were it not so plain that you are mad, it would serve you right to hang you. But, tell me! how did you do this? How came you within that cabin? But, men—quick! It may not be too late! Search the place, and all around it!"

A dark form, high up the rocky mountain-side, looked down upon the blazing torches. It was the escaping prisoner. And while he paused a moment for breath, he shook his fist defiantly at the excited crowd.

"Howl, curse you!" he panted. "Craig Morgan is not dead yet, as you, Dick Darrel, shall learn to your sorrow!"

At Dandy Dick's words, the men around him had sprung to the search.

Leading them, he ran on to the cabin and sprung within, weapons in hand. But it was empty. The prisoner was indeed gone, and a big chest, now wide open, gave a probable explanation of how the escape had been effected.

All the tiger in Dick Darrel's nature was aroused.

"He must not be allowed to get away!" he cried. "See this open chest—it tells the whole story! He has not been gone five minutes from this cabin. A thousand dollars to the man who takes him!"

"What in ruin has happened?" demanded Colonel Jim Hoxley, bounding into the cabin at that moment, half out of breath.

"That fiend has got away," cried Dick.

"Got away! Impossible!"

"It's the fact. But, quick, men! Spread out, and scour the valley! He must not—he shall not get away!"

It was no time to stop to answer questions, and Colonel Jim recognizing that, at once stirred himself to promote the search.

But search was useless, and after half an hour of futile effort it was given up.

The outlaw was gone, and past all recovery, and gradually the crowd assembled again on the Plaza in front of the Round-up.

There was Dandy Dick, pacing up and down like a restless lion cheated of his prey. His two allies were standing near with the prisoner, silent, sorrowful.

No one ventured to speak to Dick until Colonel Jim presently came up, returning from a fruitless hunt for the escaped knave.

"How did he get out?" he hotly demanded. "There's a traitor somewhere, and he shall hang for this! There was no escape otherwise."

Darrel stopped short and pointed at the trembling prisoner.

"There is the one who freed him!" he cried.

"Then by ruin she shall swing, woman though it is!" and the crowd, in hot anger, echoed the cry, and a move was actually made to that end.

"No, no, it will not do!" Dick interposed.

"We do not want to do that, my friends. That will not repair the loss, and we must not forget that it is—woman."

"That her durn!" cried a voice out of the crowd. "She's as bad as ther cuss himself, an' deserves it!"

"Hang me if you will," spoke the prisoner, in low, trembling tones. "I am willing to give my life for that of the man I love."

Dick turned from her in disgust.

"For the present lock her up," he ordered. "I must have time to consider what to do with her."

She was led away, and Dick, turning to his faithful allies, addressed them in kindly tones, saying:

"We have been cheated again, but we are not beaten. Here let us renew our vow, the vow already taken—that we will hunt this fiend to his death, even if it takes all the years of our lives. The life of Craig Morgan shall be taken by my hand—I have sworn it before, I swear it again! The high heavens hear and record the vow I take upon myself anew!"

Silently, solemnly, the three clasped hands.

At Dandy Dick's direction, finally, the woman who had come between him and the object of his just hatred was allowed to go. He considered her insane, certainly, and no other course was open to him. But he gave her fair warning never to oppose him again, under penalty of sharing the fate of the man she so foolishly loved.

She made no response, but disappeared from the camp with all haste as soon as released.

The other prisoner, "Bummer Boze" as he was called, begged hard for his life, but his pleas and protests were of no avail. He told everything he could regarding the band, hoping thus to gain some degree of mercy, but no mercy was to be had at the hands of the "tigers" of the Pocket now so thoroughly aroused.

From what he disclosed it was shown that the object the outlaws had in coming there was to watch for the shipment of bullion from the Gilt-edge Mine, of which they had heard, intending to rob the messengers when they set out.

It had been this rascal's business to keep the outlaw chief posted, so that he would know when the shipment was made.

When he had told all he could, the Bummer was promptly hanged.

And so ended the Devil's Picked Dozen, as a band. But, Duval and his Right Bower were still at large, and that more trouble might be looked for, all well realized.

On the following morning Dandy Dick, Mary Warr and Barney O'Linn went away from the Pocket, many of the citizens accompanying as far as the canyon, looking after them with questioning interest.

What would be the ending of their mission of vengeance? Would final success be theirs?—or were they destined to a new disappointment or to unending defeat? Was wrong eventually to triumph over justice and right, and Dick Darrel meet his death at the hands of this merciless villain—this devil in human form?

A few concluding words.

Ray Wallyngton recovered from his wounds, and he and his sister returned East as soon as he could travel.

From the man who had been the companion of Allan Wistner, they had learned enough to crown their mission with success. Much of the stolen fortune was recovered, and proof established that Ruby Wallyngton had been at least a lawful wife.

The shipment of bullion was made from the Gilt-edge Mine as soon as possible, before the outlaw could get another band together, and it went through in safety, to the delight of President Harcroft and the immense satisfaction of Colonel Jim Hoxley. And after a little while Paradise Pocket settled down to its usual state of easy life, with Colonel Jim still the "boss," and Tony Gallagher, Hard-head Hugh, Hickey Hen, and others, the leading minor lights of the social circle at the Round-up Saloon, which is still the principal institution of that wild camp.

THE END.

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